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Stop the Burnout: Enhancing Support Practices for Principals

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Abstract

Principals are essential for ensuring student success. Effective principals have a significant positive impact on student achievement, teacher effectiveness, a positive school culture, and inclusive school climate. Increased demands of the role which include mounting managerial tasks and a lack of systems and centralized support for principals, is decreasing the focus on effective school improvement. Current research reveals an alarming trend regarding the absence of positive principal well-being and support structures. The River District School Board (RDSB; a pseudonym) requires a detailed change process and plan to improve this issue. This Problem of Practice (PoP) and Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) seek to improve centralized supports for principals in order to improve the overall wellness of principals, reduce burnout and mitigate work intensification. A new principal well-being model is proposed that frames the PoP with precision and will act as an overarching theoretical lens. Solutions to this issue are explored utilizing distributive and ethical leadership approaches. The organizational congruence model of Nadler and Tushman (1989) is used to evaluate the change process in order to collaboratively guide principals, central office staff and senior administration in this change for improved principal support practices.

Keywords: principal well-being, principal support, principal burnout, ethical leadership, distributive leadership

Executive Summary

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) explores a Problem of Practice (PoP) in an educational organization in Nova Scotia. Principals in this organization are challenged with increased work intensification and mounting managerial tasks. This is a social justice and equity issue as principal workloads and intensification creates a situation where the health and well-being of principals is not sustainable due to these negative impacts. We are faced with a lack of aspiring leaders in our system leading to succession plan issues for the future, which must be addressed now. It is well known that student success is significantly impacted by strong leadership in schools (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). The goal is to improve centralized support for principals and vice principals in the River District School Board (RDSB; a pseudonym) to combat work intensification and increase well-being. What are the best research-based solutions and supports that can be implemented in the RDSB? To ensure the most effective principals are leading our schools, we must mobilize a strategy to increase support and foster conditions for principals in order to maximize student achievement and well-being. Solutions will be examined and explored in depth followed by recommendations for the most optimal solution and change process to be implemented in the RDSB.

Chapter 1 provides a close analysis of role and agency as a principal in RDSB and explores how my values and my own personal leadership lens connect to the PoP. RDSB is examined thoroughly as an organization through a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). The PoP is described in detail and the literature and research regarding principal well-being is highlighted. This supports a full understanding in the RDSB of what steps must be taken to achieve optimal principal support. The principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) is a theoretical blended framework proposed in this OIP. This model can assist districts to

understand the impacts of principal job demands. This model shows that if job demands such as long hours, little downtime, work intensification, and a lack of centralized supports continue to be the norm, we will continue to see principals suffering from ill health, job related anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, and strain. With appropriate personal and job resources, our principals can flourish and positively affect both individual and organizational outcomes in their districts.

Chapter 2 explores the chosen leadership approaches to assist with responding to this PoP. Ethical and distributed leadership are analyzed and connected to the leadership approach to change. These approaches are examined in relation to the RDSB organizational context and connected to my personal agency as a principal leader. The ADKAR model for change management (Hiatt, 2006) is selected as the best fit for moving forward with this change. The steps of this model are elaborated in relation to the RDSB and the issue of principal burnout and lack of support. Organizational change readiness in the RDSB is dissected using Nadler and Tushman's (1989) congruence model. This model is effective for analyzing complex organizational problems such as this one. It supports that RDSB is ready for this change process to support principal well-being. Possible solutions are explored, explained and compared to discover the most optimal solution to move forward within the OIP. After examining potential solutions, a rationale is presented for the chosen solution to be implemented.

Chapter 3 describes implementation, evaluation and communication of the change to all stakeholders, all guided by the ADKAR model for change. This chapter details the implementation plan of the optimal solution for RDSB, a change process evaluation strategy, as well as an effective communication plan to ensure stakeholder support and on-going commitment to this change process. A PDSA cycle (Plan, Do, Study, Act) (Deming, 1993) is used to monitor the change and guide the team through the process. The value of creating a

change implementation team is discussed, and a clear pilot project and full implementation of the change is explained. Data collection and ongoing feedback are integrated into the change plan to track progress and ensure implementation is strong.

The OIP draws to a close with next steps and a narrative epilogue for reflection. The solution is attainable and applicable for RDSB as an organization to become a leader in Nova Scotia and afar with exemplary centralized support practices for principals.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this OIP was written in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

This work is dedicated to my husband, Trevor, and children, Callum and Maeve. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support as we navigated the ebbs and flows of this doctoral degree together. I hope my journey instils a love of lifelong learning and pursuit of your own dreams. To my parents, thank you for your love and support as I completed this highest honour of doctorate work at Western University. You have championed all my goals from a young age, and I hold much appreciation for your central role in nurturing the educator and person I have become.

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List of Acronyms

ADKAR Model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement)

HR (Human Resources)

ITSS (Information Technology Support Specialists)

JD-R (Job Demands-Resources Theory)

MPAA (Maritime Province Administrators Association; Pseudonym)

MPDOE (Maritime Province Department of Education; Pseudonym)

OIP (Organizational Improvement Plan)

PESTLE Analysis (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legislative, Environmental)

PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act)

PoP (Problem of Practice)

RDSB (River District School Board; Pseudonym)

RED (Regional Executive Director)

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

Definitions

Burnout: For principals, burnout has been defined as “a state of complete physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from an inability to cope effectively over an extended period of time with the daily, unresolved stressors associated with school leadership” (Allen & Schumacher, 2006, p. 18).

Distributive Leadership: Collective leadership that is shared among stakeholders in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and change (IGI Global, 2022)

Ethical Leadership: The “demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120).

Well-Being: "A positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions.

Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose” (The World Health Organization, 2021, para. 1).

Chapter 1: Problem Posing

This Problem of Practice (PoP) and Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) seeks to examine practices related to support and overall wellness of principals. Practices will be explored to improve the issue of burnout, lack of succession planning and an absence of aspiring leaders in our system.

For this OIP, the term principal is used to represent all school administrators, both principals and vice principals. As a principal in River District School Board (RDSB; pseudonym), the value in this work is deeply personal. Reflecting on the circumstances and experiences of principal work-life balance and work intensification has provided motivation to intervene in order to improve organizational systems of support for those leading our schools (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

I am committed to working with all stakeholders in the RDSB to develop a clear vision of where the change can take us and will utilize critical consultation skills including interpersonal communication, partnerships and problem solving to ensure the organizational intervention with the OIP will succeed and flourish over time (Zins & Illback, 1995).

Positionality and Lens Statement

I am the principal of Oceanstone Public School (pseudonym), the largest elementary school in the RDSB serving over 600 students and 70 staff. I am a seasoned administrator with a depth of experience as a teacher, school counsellor, vice principal, and now principal at all levels from K-12. As a principal, I am a member of the Maritime Province Administrators Association (MPAA; a pseudonym). The MPAA aims to provide support and advocacy to public school administrators.

My values provide the base of my leadership approach and include a deep sense of moral courage, compassion, empathy, and a strong focus on effective communication at all levels. I use a mindful listening approach with calm energy, an open mind and a focused attention with those I serve (Tschannen-Moran, 2018).

I feel a deep sense of ethical responsibility to serve and empower others. I am energized by a moral imperative and a relentless commitment that the learning of all students must drive every decision (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). In order for this moral imperative to be achieved, we must ensure timely action with this OIP so that the most skilled principals are leading our schools with strong support from the district level. Ethical leadership will work in accordance with distributive leadership to guide the leadership practices within this OIP. My personal positionality and agency in the RDSB as principal leader provides an opportunity to lead from the middle as a principal advocating for all principals. Fullan (2015) promotes this approach when he explains that leading from the middle allows "a deliberate strategy that increases the capacity and internal coherence of the middle as it becomes a more effective partner upward to the state and downward to its schools and communities, in pursuit of greater system performance" (p. 24). Leading from the middle as a principal allows me to connect in one direction to the district and provincial level priorities as well as in another direction to ensure the needs of our school community are honoured. My agency in this position allows me the opportunity to consider multiple viewpoints and drive the change as a middle influencer advocating for effective principal support.

Theoretical Framework

Ethical leadership and distributive leadership work in harmony together under Baker and Demerouti's (2017) job demand-resource (JD-R) theory by focusing on what is morally right and

sharing the load to affect change. This theoretical framework focuses on understanding how the demands of a position can lead to burnout and negative job performance. Work intensification on our principals is growing and creating a straight line to burnout and a challenge to find a work-life balance (Ontario Principals Council, 2017). Personal resources and job resources can work mutually to ensure positive motivation leading to positive job performance. Initiatives to assess and support principal well-being will prevent principals from leaving schools and the school leader profession (Kaufman et al., 2022). Supports needed for employee wellness are a crucial aspect when exploring principal job demands. Work demands alone do not lead to stress and burnout. In addition, a wide range of well-being factors must be considered as they interact with job demands to influence a principal's stress (Tinline & Cooper, 2019). A theory that works synchronously with Baker and Demerouti's (2017) JD-R theory is Robertson and Cooper's (2011) ASSET model of workplace well-being. This model takes key workplace factors and psychological well-being and indicates the connection to individual and organizational outcomes.

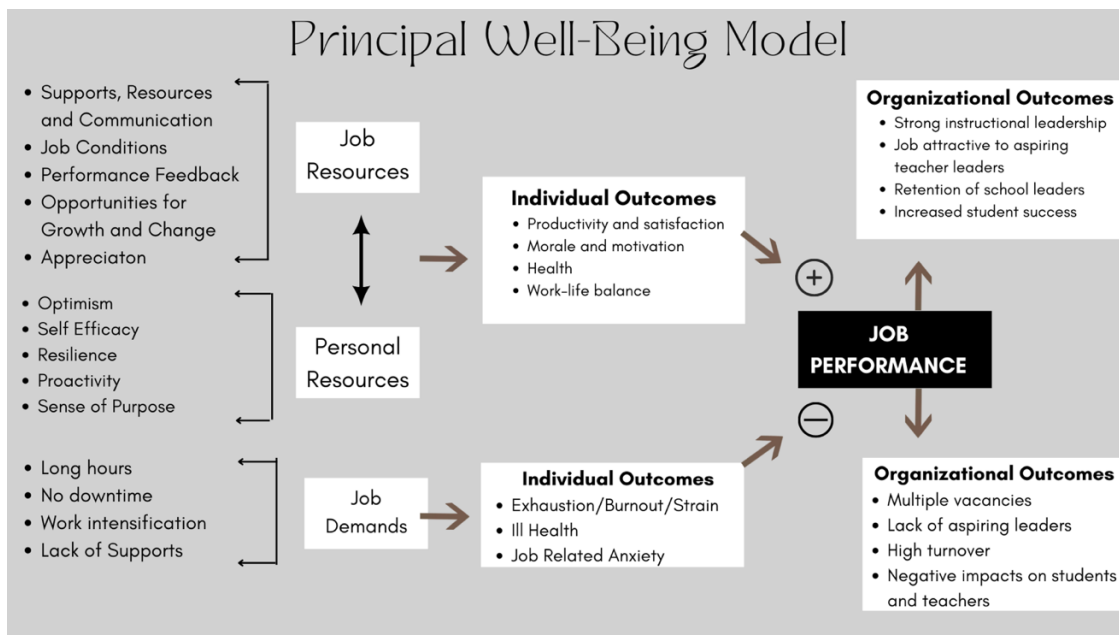
The JD-R theory and the ASSET model of workplace well-being have been merged as one for the purpose of this OIP and will act as a strong theoretical framework for moving forward in the change process. This blended theoretical framework will provide a focal point for the OIP. These models come together to focus on the importance of supports and resources required for principals to have positive job performance, which leads to positive organizational outcomes such as strong instructional leadership, increased student success and retention of school leaders. With these proper supports from the district level, individual outcomes for principals can also be achieved including positive health, work-life balance and high morale. In this theoretical framework, personal resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, resilience,

proactivity, and a sense of purpose work when synchronization occurs with job resources provided by school districts to produce positive individual and organizational outcomes.

This new blended model ensures an in depth understanding of the impacts of job demands such as a lack of support for principals and highlights both the potential for positivity as well as the negative effects and gaps on both the organization and the individual administrator. This framework is clear: if job demands such as long hours, no downtime, work intensification and a lack of centralized supports continue to be a focus, we will continue to see principals suffering from ill health, job related anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, and strain. With appropriate personal and job resources, our principals can flourish and positively affect both individual and organizational outcomes in their districts. The principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) frames the PoP with precision and will act as an overarching lens for the OIP (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Principal Well-Being Model: A Blended Theoretical Model and Framework



Note. McMullen (2023). Adapted from Baker & Demerouti's (2017) JD-R theory and Robertson & Cooper's (2010) ASSET model of workplace well-being.

The PoP and OIP will focus attention on the supports and job resources required to avoid negative individual and organizational outcomes in the RDSB such as multiple vacancies, a lack of teachers showing interest in the principal role and high turnover of principals (Ontario Principals Council, 2017).

Theoretical Lens and Paradigm

This PoP can be viewed through a liberal and interpretive framework to help with understanding the issue.

Liberal Lens

This PoP is approached from a liberal lens which focuses on change, progress and uncovering procedures related to beliefs, attitudes and values in education (Gutek, 2013). The current model for principal support is lacking and requires a team approach to bring equilibrium to the system so that the improved support structures can be felt positively at all levels of RDSB, reverberating right down to the individual student. Gutek (2013) explains that using a liberal lens allows institutional issues to be re-evaluated to solve problems and improve life, both inside and outside of the organization.

The obstacle of principal burnout and an absence of well-being in the principal role must be understood due to its impact on student success, teacher support and the overall functioning of our education system. The principal well-being model being proposed is being viewed through a liberal lens as it seeks to understand job and personal resources and how these resources can counteract negative individual and organizational outcomes. This liberal approach will bring about a change that can lead to positive outcomes in the OIP to improve conditions for all stakeholders in the RDSB (Plazek, 2012). A liberal lens can be infused through an ethical and distributive leadership approach to positively affect change in the OIP. This lens focuses on

equity, human rights and morality (Thompson, 2017). This liberal approach will allow for attention on equitable outcomes for principals and all stakeholders in the RDSB.

Interpretive Paradigm

An interpretive paradigm where a village of leaders and stakeholders can honour all voices in the OIP.

As made clear by the poem below, an interpretive paradigm allows for a true understanding of the subjective experience of individuals and allows for a focus on the lived experience of the participant (Morgan, 1980). “A life-world of meaning is investigated, unpacked and laid bare, unearthing patterns, connections or themes, and told as an Interpretivist, with such care” (Dean, 2018, p. 6). An interpretive approach will unfold the issue of a lack of principal support and high levels of burnout brought to light by studying the meaning of principals’ roles and the way they make sense of their role (Putnam, 1983). Putman (1983) further explains that uncovering the relationship between humans and their environment in the human resource frame allows for the environment to be shaped in a positive way with consideration of organizational influences and uncovering of forces that constrain an organization and the individuals within it. I will look at the RSDB through a lens grounded in interpretivist epistemology which will capture principal voice to affect this change on a large system-wide scale.

As Descza et al. (2020) so creatively explained through the story of the two stonecutters: one, when asked what he was doing, simply said he was building a wall. The second stonecutter responded that he was building a cathedral. Our current model of principal support is not leading to optimal organizational results. As a collective, we must work diligently to build the beautiful equitable cathedral of support with a collective vision for the future. One way that this will be

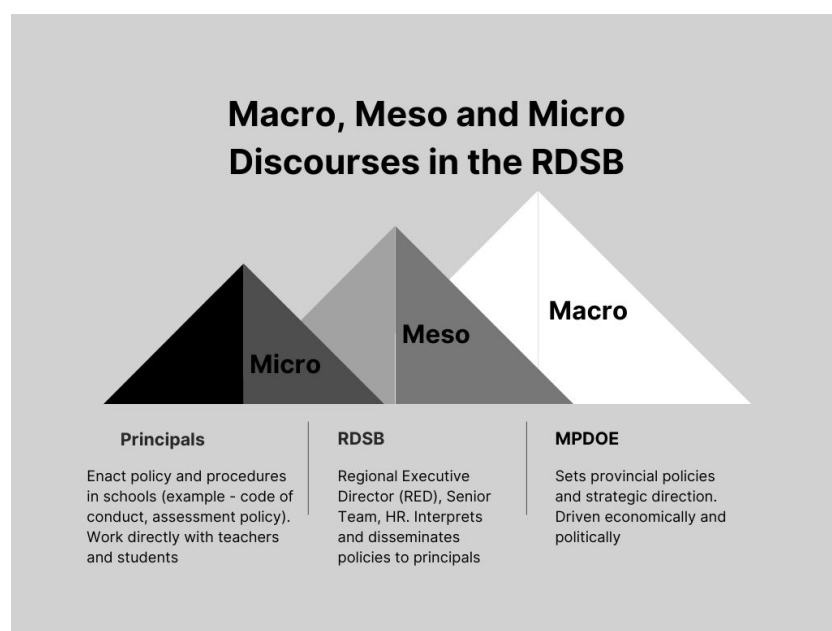
explored is through analyzing and utilizing my agency, positionality and lens in approaching this PoP.

Organizational Context

RDSB provides English and French language education to approximately 7000 students in 26 schools in the district. The district is part of a provincial system under the authority of the Maritime Province Department of Education (MPDOE; a pseudonym), the Minister of the MPDOE, and the Deputy Minister of the MPDOE (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Macro, Meso and Micro Discourses in RDSB



Note. Policy discourses include the MPDOE, the RDSB and principals.

A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is helpful for an organization to identify and analyze strengths and challenges in order to ensure an appropriate strategy when embarking on a change effort (Gurel & Tat, 2017). A comprehensive analysis of the organization is essential in the change process as it allows for identification of the issue and

forces that are possible causes of the problem (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). This in-depth analysis allows for the uncovering of major contextual factors that impact the RDSB and must be taken into consideration when embarking upon a change process. Macro factors within the RDSB are analysed below using a SWOT analysis.

Strengths

RDSB is led by a dedicated team of passionate leaders, teaching staff, support staff, food service workers, custodial staff, bus drivers, and central office staff. The region draws many families to the area from out of province seeking a slower pace of life with a small town feel and beautiful coastal and rural atmospheres. RDSB is committed to decolonization, social justice, equity, and promotion of inclusion for all students.

Principals are supported by a central office team of coordinators and consultants as well as student support workers in the schools who work with students of Indigenous and African descent and their families. This team is committed to:

- Promoting inclusive education for students of all beliefs, races, religions, cultures, and lifestyles.
- Providing anti-racism, anti-discrimination and anti-homophobic education to students, staff and the school community.
- Providing counseling and intervention with regards to bullying and/or cyber-bullying.
- Engaging in outreach and consultation processes with appropriate community partners.
- Developing professional development opportunities for staff (RDSB, 2021, para. 3).

Principals also receive support from a strong student services team. The RDSB student services team is committed to the philosophy that all students have the right to an education system that

honours each student's unique strengths and needs throughout each transition within their schooling career. (RDSB, 2021).

An existing aspiring leadership program in the RDSB was initiated by the MPDOE and connects teachers to appropriate professional development if they are interested in moving into leadership roles in the future (ELCNS, 2022). This program requires teachers to self-select through an application followed by an interview with the senior level team for admission into the program. Although this program is seen as a strength, there is room for improvement with follow up of the aspiring leaders once the program is complete as well as identifying strong teacher leaders to support as applicants. This will be a consideration for the OIP.

RDSB's regional improvement plan focuses on "strengthening with intention" (p. 1) the quality of instruction, student achievement, and student and staff well-being (RDSB, 2020). This strength drives educator practice and recognizes that in order for our students to achieve and be well, that staff well-being must also be a priority. We will work collaboratively with all partners including principals, central office staff and the senior level team to continue strengthening the plan to ensure principal well-being and value that the plan recognizes and celebrates this.

Current research urges education leaders and policymakers to acknowledge that well-being among principals must be a priority and swift change must be implemented at the system level (Steiner et al., 2022). Senior leaders in RDSB recognize that this is a crucial step, and following through on plans to ensure that this occurs is critical. This vision connects to the PoP, which will tackle an organizational change process that will take RDSB from the current state with lack of supports for principals to a desired state where robust supports and conditions exist (Burke, 2018). As a result, the RDSB will have a future state in the organization with well, strong and supported principals leading our schools and a strategy for success.

Weaknesses

When a new principal is hired in RDSB, either internally or externally, there are no formalized support programs or policy guidelines to assist with this important transition nor are there mentorship programs to assist these new employees with navigating the multifaceted responsibilities a principal is tasked with. A clear succession plan involves attracting, screening, and identifying potential school administrator candidates, but also must involve administrator preparation and support once the job is secured (Normore, 2006). We need to utilize the expertise of current experienced principals to move this to an area of strength. There have certainly been efforts over the years to acknowledge and attempt this; and we can use these previous efforts in a positive way to ensure change in the organization that is positive for all involved.

Opportunities

Covid-19 has presented our school system with a deep look into the success or need to change practices within schools and the overall system. Many of the changes made recently related to Covid-19 protocols have actually morphed into new strengths. For example, the ability to offer families Zoom meetings rather than always in person meetings has provided families with flexibility and changed our communications strategy. These new ways of being have provided stakeholders with an increased resilience and opportunity for the future. This has primed the RDSB to welcome change.

Pre-pandemic, principals in the province voted to leave the teacher's union in 2018. A professional governing body, the MPAA, was initiated to support principals across the province. Although still in its infancy, MPAA is a key stakeholder of opportunity for the profession moving forward and looks to represent the diverse interest and voices of principals at both the

regional and school level (MPAA, 2021). MPAA priorities include advocacy, support and protection of principals. MPAA is a key stakeholder to provide support and guidance to the RDSB principals. When asked how MPAA plans to support principal well-being moving forward, the Executive Director of the organization provided this statement:

Since its inception in August 2018, the MPAA (pseudonym) has established priorities, goals, and actions based on direct input from administrators and the Board of Directors. Work intensification and well-being for administrators have been identified as being of great importance. A contractual example in response to these priorities is the negotiated improvement in *Section 10: School Year* of the Terms and Conditions of Employment. This section contains improved guidelines that help to protect the administrator's personal time and provides time in lieu in certain circumstances to offset additional work performed outside the school year for students. A second example of the Association responding to the needs of the administrator is the contracted dedicated access to a clinical social worker. This timely intervention better serves administrators in need of urgent access to mental health support. These are just two examples of realizing improvements and responding to the self-identified needs of administrators. Having signed in June 2022 the new Terms and Conditions of employment, MPAA is looking ahead. A number of additional working groups have been created with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with a focus on "Respectful Workplace" and "Recruitment and Retention". Discussions among members at these tables will lead to targeted actions in order to improve the working environment in practical ways. The Association anticipates that work intensification and well-being will continue to be high priorities for administrators when MPAA concludes its strategic planning process this spring. The voices of administrators

from across the province have been captured through surveys and focus groups. Their contributions will set the direction for the coming years and determine the development of future support and action. (personal communication, March 6, 2023)

Threats

High rates of principal turnover, a lack of succession planning, and too few aspiring leaders wishing to move into administrative roles provides a threat that jeopardizes the culture of the entire RDSB educational system (Ontario Principals Council, 2017). Many principals are sacrificing their own health and well-being due to work intensification. These threats can be minimized through careful planning of best support practices and following through on a plan to effectively deal with these challenges. The OIP seeks to ensure this materializes in the RDSB while utilizing an ethical and distributive approach under the lens of the principal well-being model to guide the approach.

Leadership Problem of Practice

“Principals **really** matter. Indeed, it is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership” (Grisson et al., 2021, p. XIV). The OIP will explore best practices to support principal well-being. This will ensure an equitable change and implementation of these improved practices with precision. The OIP will seek to honour the importance of this investment and ensure that an appropriate action plan is put in place to address the crisis currently faced in the system. We have an opportunity to collaboratively move forward in the RDSB with a plan to effectively support our principals.

A challenge facing school systems in this Maritime province is a lack of systems and centralized supports for principals and vice principals, which leads to burnout and a lack of qualified applicants for these positions. NASSP (2021) reports that 4 out of 10 school principals

expect to leave the profession during the next three years. The shortage of effective principals is a global crisis that requires a concrete plan where expectations and support for principals are prioritized and re-framed (Schmidt-Davis, 2011). Current research reveals an alarming trend regarding the absence of positive principal well-being (ACU, 2022; Allen Queen & Schumacher, 2006; Bauer & Brazer, 2011; Ontario Principals' Council, 2017; Pollock, 2014, 2016, 2017; Steiner et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Walker & Qian, 2006). It is imperative to examine how to best affect change and provide improved support to principal roles amidst the expectations and demands set on them by their districts to better reflect and address their intensified work realities (Wang et al., 2021). It is well known that student success is significantly impacted by strong leadership in schools (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). The RDSB requires a detailed change process and plan to improve principal support to recruit, retain and support our principals so that we promote achievement and well-being of our students.

The position of principal is seen by many in the school community as daunting and overwhelming. Many strong teachers with leadership capabilities are turning away from any capacity building or administrator preparatory programs leaving a lack of strong candidates for these roles (Schmidt-Davis, 2011). Pollock (2014) demonstrated that principals reported working 58.7 hours per week and these principals showed a significant emotional burnout. Effective principals have a significant positive impact on student success and staff effectiveness but the increased demands of the role for mounting managerial tasks is decreasing that focus on instructional leadership.

The problem of practice under investigation is the need to address the widening gap of school principal burnout and the practices needed to retain, support and cultivate principals. This is a social justice and equity issue as principal workloads and intensification creates a situation

where the health and well-being of principals is unsustainable. As a result, a high rate of turnover that negatively affects the cultures of schools and the education system has been created (Ontario Principals Council, 2017). Responding to this succession issue proactively will promote equity in the workplace and a protection of principal well-being (ACU, 2022).

Framing the Problem of Practice

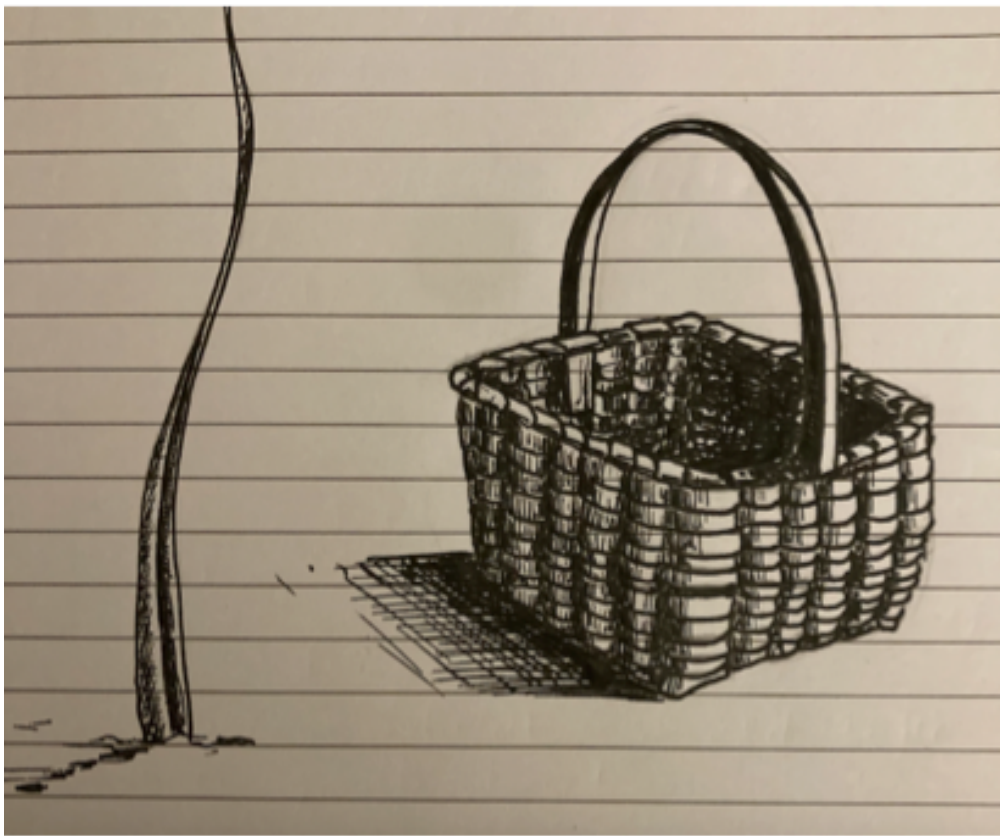
Theoretical framing is an important aspect of developing organizational change (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017) can be used to frame this PoP as it focuses on what organizations and people do to support one another. Using this frame as a lens in RDSB to uncover the challenges faced by principals will allow for an effective way to come together collectively to see this change through. We will examine how the system can be changed through actions arising from the concern about principal well-being regarding this important topic (Fullan, 2021). “If we get the ingredients right, we can expect accelerated growth and improvement” (p. 38). The structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017) is also helpful to view this PoP through as it focuses on examining and designing organizations for maximum efficiency and that individuals act with confidence in a suitable role and responsibility. The RDSB is structured in way that individuals achieve their position through experience and training and employees can accommodate both their individual goals as well as collective RDSB goals which is key in a structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017). If principals are to be efficient in their roles and reach their collective and individual goals, we must be committed to strengthening centralized support structures to improve well-being.

Improving principal support in the RDSB will allow for a focus on the human and ethical aspects of the profession. As a change leader, I embrace the diverse tapestry of our system in RDSB and will utilize approaches that allow me to fully understand and embrace my agency,

influence, optimism and tenacity as a change initiator (Deszca et al., 2020). Similar to the current metaphor of principal support as a single blade of grass (Figure 3), I will support the system and seek out collaborative partners to make changes so that a woven basket of change is created where principal support can be strengthened and re-woven into habits of action and a belief system that allow for an improved focus on well-being (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Figure 3

Metaphor of Current Principal Support



Note. Metaphor of principal support represented as a single blade of grass in comparison to the collaborative strength of a woven basket of many blades together by T. McMullen (2021)

This metaphor connects directly with the planned leadership approaches for the PoP reflecting ethical and distributive leadership. This metaphor of principals acting as a single blade of grass without adequate support can be put behind us through implementing researched based

solutions. To reach the fully woven basket where improved principal support is attained, a distributive leadership approach will be taken where multiple actors in the RDSB promote and participate in the change. The RDSB is primed with a vision that can support this. We can collaboratively improve this issue through a thoughtful and strategic change initiative.

Swift change is required to adequately support school administrators to recruit and retain the right leaders (Deszca et al., 2020). The issue of principal burnout described in this OIP is alarming and we must reprioritize our plans to shift the current narrative, in the MPDOE, the RDSB, and across Canada.

PESTLE Analysis

A PESTLE analysis is helpful when exploring organizational change processes to understand what drives this process and need for change (Morrison, 2016). These include factors such as political, economic, social, technological, legislative, and environmental. For this PoP, political, legislative, social, and technological factors will be considered.

Political Factors

The RDSB is committed, through Policy 215 (number changed for anonymity), to hiring the most competent and capable administrators based on the qualifications, abilities and experience necessary for the position (RDSB, 2018). While this commitment is crucial, there is a lack of promising aspiring leaders as well as an unwillingness of some strong teacher leaders to move into administrative roles.

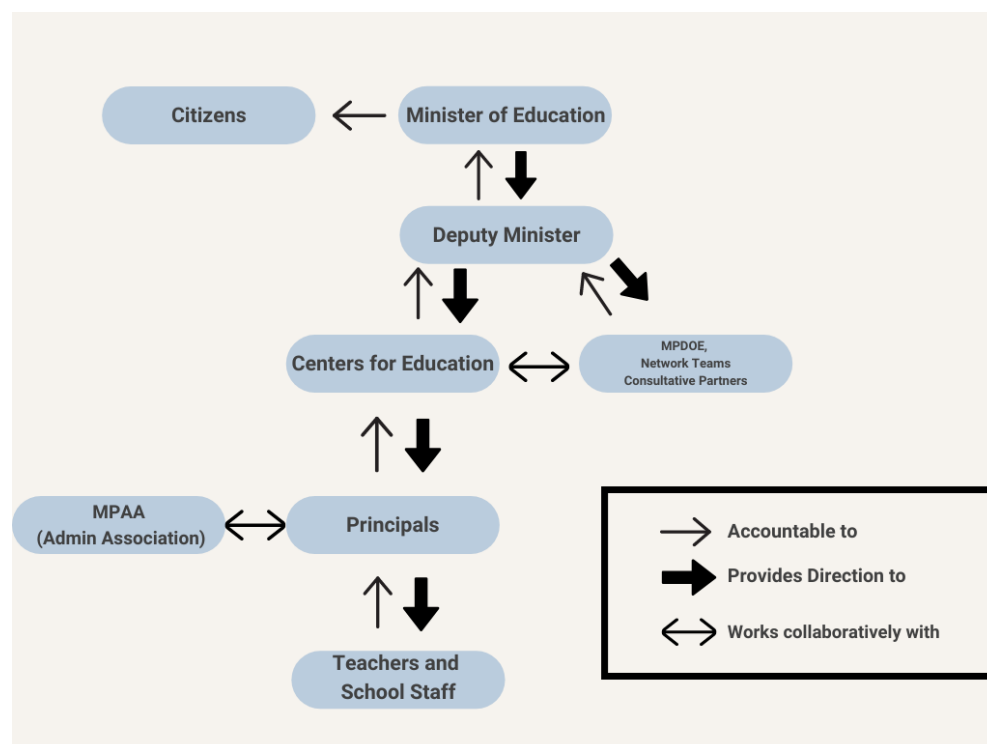
The importance of creating trust in our system was highlighted by Dr. Avis Glaze (2018) in her report on how stakeholders in MPDOE and regional systems felt about the way they were treated as educators:

Lack of clarity. Mistrust. Upon reflection, those may be the words that came up most frequently in my dozens of consultation sessions around the province. I will not point fingers. I will simply say that the relationships, the “us” and “them”, and the frustration, even cynicism, were evident in many meetings and online surveys. (p.17)

This highlights the feelings of some stakeholders and has and will be used to drive positive change forward to benefit our staff and students. Equity and inclusion has been a commitment for the MPDOE and new policies, procedures and initiatives continue to support this. Glaze (2018) recommended the dismantling and dissolution of the School Boards in MPDOE and proposed a new system (see Figure 4), which was implemented in 2018.

Figure 4

Governance and Administrative Structure



Note. This hierarchical structure shows accountability, direction and collaboration in the MPDOE and RDSB

Legislative Factors

After beginning this new provincial structure without elected boards and trustees, governance practices continue to evolve and we must find a way within this new structure to impact a positive system of support for our principals. As educational leaders, we must work within current policy and governance structures in pursuit of stronger practices, strengthening the bonds at each level and being guided by our ethics and moral imperative. As Campbell & Fullan (2019) so eloquently said:

Get your tool shed in order. Keep an eye on the fundamental issues: moral imperative, strategic focus, deep learning & mind your manner. Use tools to help organize and focus on these systemic matters. Mutual coherence about the nature and daily pursuit of your mandate in what you are seeking. (p. 143)

The RDSB is committed to responding to this issue and creating a strong system of support for principals.

Social Factors

Social factors are one of the main drivers influencing the change process for this PoP. Norton (2003) reports that the influences for principal shortages include changing demands of the job, salary, time, lack of respect, and overall lack of support. As a result of these extensive demands, fewer teachers desire to move into principal roles. Gates et al. (2006) highlights the serious concern about high levels of principal turnover having a direct and negative connection with student success. The issue of filling these roles and exploring global strong succession and support practices must be examined further when moving forward.

Attempting to juggle the work-life balance as a school administrator becomes very challenging. Those who step down from the principal position or move into alternate roles, step

away in search of this crucial balance that all employees deserve (Conley & Cooper, 2011). Chirichello (2004) appeals for a redefinition by school systems in regards to the role of a principal in order for strong teachers to consider a leap from teaching into school leadership. It is suggested that the myth of the super principal will always be an illusion as humans are unable to meet current expectations within the existing model of support (Chirichello, 2014). This includes unrealistic managerial tasks paired with instructional leadership duties and not enough support.

Walker & Qian (2006) use the metaphor of a greasy pole to describe the experiences of new and seasoned school leaders who simply climb the pole, not able to ever reach the top even though all of their energy and passion is put into the climb. The greasy pole and demands of the job continue to be a barrier to success, often leading to quality principals either burning out or leaving the profession.

These drivers of change reflect the social aspect, which is directly connected to the importance of utilizing an ethical and distributive leadership approach to frame this PoP. Having a clear OIP to respond to these concerns will allow the RDSB to build capacity in all aspects of leadership in our system.

Technological Factors

Technological forces at play with this change process include improving principal support and succession stemming from mounting administrative tasks that have increased over the years as the rate of technology use increases in school systems. Principals are often working long hours and responding to the constant presence of technology. This has led to more burnout and 24/7 access to principals (Navarra, 2021). Currently, the RDSB does not have any organizational policies or practices to proactively ensure principals maintain a work/life balance

free from technology such as the Disconnecting from Work Policy in the Durham District School Board in Ontario (DDSB, 2022). This policy in the DDSB is for all employees and advises to not engage in any work communication including emailing and video calling between the hours of 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 a.m., Monday to Friday, all day Saturday, Sunday, and statutory holidays unless for emergency purposes.

The impact of technology must be carefully considered as we embark on this organizational change. If the RDSB can enhance the overall effectiveness of the system, we will see an increase in the ability of the school system to generate value for the students and staff they serve (Deszca et al., 2020). The single greatest value is the well-being of our students and in order to maximize this value, it is paramount that we invest in promoting and supporting our principals by examining the role of technology in the profession.

Guiding Questions

I believe that leaders must consistently develop other leaders and build capacity in all facets of the role. As explained by Fullan (2017), a leader should consistently build up the people in their care so that when the leader exits, the skills, growth and capacity of the followers will continue to drive positive change. Through collaboration and my values described above, ethical and distributive leadership can help to build a culture where we support principals effectively. Both leadership approaches will be explored in detail in Chapter 2 to describe how they can propel this change. This prompts exploration of the question: How can ethical and distributive leadership be used to assist, guide and champion the implementation of support practices for administrators?

A positive step for this PoP is an in-depth analysis of best practices in systems both in North America and worldwide that have implemented support systems for principals effectively.

In a study of school leadership around the world (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008), 22 education systems completed reports on best practices and analysis of school leadership. This comprehensive report should be referred to when analyzing solutions to be implemented with success as the recommendations include a significant body of evidence-based research. This prompts consideration of the question: What are the best research-based solutions and supports for school leadership that can be implemented in the RDSB?

The needs of the hierarchical model must be considered throughout the change process. Kotter (2012) reports that in change management, hierarchy can be used as an advantage to form a guiding coalition to support the change. This can connect to a distributive leadership approach where we work with and extend the influence of others. It is important to explore this further and look at how the new provincial structure can benefit improved support for principals in the RDSB. Support from each level of the hierarchy will be crucial. Armenakis & Harris (2009) discuss change beliefs and ensuring that employees at all levels embrace the change and see it as much more than simply a passing fad. Using managerial influence strategies such as persuasive communication will ensure transmission of the important message components to increase buy-in (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Deszca et al. (2020) further support this when reporting that change agents need to demonstrate that the need for change is real, important and that a shared understanding at all levels is developed and maintained. This will be achieved through the collaborative, distributive efforts with the creation of a guiding coalition to bring urgency to the need to implement effective systems of support for our principals. This will be framed by the principal well-being model to guide our work. This prompts attention to the question: Given the dissolution of the elected boards and the hierarchical provincial model, what is the best strategy

to ensure stakeholder buy in for the proposed changes to support principal well-being succession?

Leadership Focused Vision for Change

Gap Between Current and Desired State

The World Health Organization (2021) defines well-being as follows:

Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose. (para. 1)

Work intensification of daily work has been shown to impact principal well-being (Pollock, 2016). Pollock highlights that principals in her study reported changes to their own well-being due to this work intensification. This creates an inequitable situation for our principals and is fraught with ethical concerns. Increasing supports for principals in response to this issue is imperative (Pollock & Wang, 2020). A lack of robust support is unethical as it ignores important values such as caring, respect, responsibility and fairness (Tuana, 2014). Principals require a strong ethics of care in order to maximize their impact at all levels. Some of today's organizational environments are life destroying rather than life enhancing, and we must approach principal support with a re-orientation and vision for change where individuals and communities can flourish (Glatter, 2006). As Tuana (2014) makes clear, we must approach this ethical dilemma with the utmost moral purpose, courage and hope to ensure we are doing everything we can to adequately support the leaders in our system. The desired future state is one where principal workloads are manageable, and support systems are abundant and clear. This will challenge the current inequity within principal roles and will improve overall principal well-

being which will reverberate positively to other organizational actors: students, teachers, central office staff and the wider school communities which principals support.

Principals have a tremendous weight on their shoulders including the high expectations, aspirations and hope of the entire school community (Bauer & Brazer, 2011). Supporting principals is crucial for their success (Oladipo et al., 2016), so a clear plan for support needs to exist in school districts. Effective leadership at all levels is essential for this vision of support to come to fruition.

This OIP will promote an innovative change process that closes the gap. This includes practical applications and recommendations in the RDSB to support leaders committed to moving student achievement and well-being forward.

Priorities for Change

Weingartner (2009) highlights the vacancy shortage in postings for administrative positions where they are increasingly seeing no qualified candidates responding. This is present in the RDSB, with some principal and vice principal jobs being posted in successive rounds before a principal is hired.

Unsustainable work-life practices are leading to overload and burnout (Pollock, 2017). For those who desire to enter the role of school administrator, burnout is an additional force at play due to overwhelming task overload. Burnout for principals has been defined by Allen & Schumacher (2006) as “a state of complete physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from an inability to cope effectively over an extended period of time with the daily, unresolved stressors associated with school leadership” (p. 18). Allen & Schumacher (2006) also reported that 75 per cent of principals experience symptoms due to stress such as fatigue, weakness, lack of energy, irritability, heartburn, headache, trouble sleeping, sexual dysfunction, and depression.

Attempting to juggle the work-life balance as a school administrator becomes very challenging. One principal in Pollock's 2017 study highlighted this: "I love my job. I love what I do. I just cannot do it." (p. 548). Furthermore, 87% of principals indicated that they never seem to have enough time to do their work and only 38% of principals felt they had the resources necessary to do their job properly (Pollock, 2017).

In addition to a lack of resources, Pollock (2016) highlighted that changes to principal work has increased stress levels due to unmanageable workload, complexities of the role, and an increased focus on instructional leadership. The principal role has morphed over the years into a superhuman-like role that may wear upon passionate educators and greatly affect their health and well-being both inside and outside of school.

A lack of system support leaves many administrators feeling stuck in a silo at their school, alone and unsupported. Only 20.4% of principals in Pollock's (2014) study reported high levels of interaction with school board staff. System leaders must recognize that principal retention and adequate support is a global crisis that requires urgent attention. Strong and meaningful support from central office has been shown to improve the overall experiences of administrators and this will be explored further (Bauer & Brazer, 2011).

This data presented must to be considered when uncovering strong systems of support in the RDSB. We envision systems of support in place that respond to this so that the days of "sink or swim" for school administrators are far behind us (Mitgang, 2007, p. 5). Having a clear support plan will allow the RDSB to build capacity in all aspects of leadership in our system. This future state will promote and celebrate leadership and will allow the region to prepare its people for every transition that they encounter. These priorities for change reflect the critical human aspect, which is integral to an ethical approach.

Leadership Considerations

Consideration of leadership must be a focus at all macro, meso and micro levels. Provincially, we are guided by policies set by the MPDOE and as a change agent, I will ensure communication with these parties for support of the OIP. Other actors to consider and embrace include principals, vice principals, senior level team and central office staff. Leadership at MPSS will be consulted and involved as a change effort in the RDSB could resonate to increase support in other areas of the province. MPSS remains a key stakeholder which must guide, consult, protect and support all principals in the province. In order to affect a system change in the RDSB, a collaborative approach using an ethical and distributive leadership model will be explored and implemented in order to change the current system (Fullan, 2021). Fullan (2021) explains that systems change when there are degrees of dissatisfaction such as principals leaving the role at such an alarming rate and strong aspiring leaders avoiding moving into administrative roles. A critical shift is required in order to improve this issue and move our district into an area where pride and success envelop both the leaders and followers collaboratively in our system.

All of the leadership priorities and influences upon this vision for change must be considered to attain the future state of principal well-being and support while balancing and celebrating the RDSB's goal of strengthening with intention student success at all levels. The success of this change will be felt at all levels (provincial, regional and school, and individual students) and each leader will be an important part of this change strategy.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 explored my personal positionality and lens statement, the RDSB organizational context, an in-depth exploration of the leadership problem and framed the problem to have a clear understanding of it. Guiding questions were explored to help understand

the factors and influences that contribute to the main problem. The chapter ended with a leadership-focused vision for change, analysis of the gap, and the desired future state. This exploration provides a springboard to Chapter 2 where RDSB readiness for change and solutions to the issue emerge.

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

Introduction

Chapter 2 investigates the chosen leadership approaches to leading the change. Ethical and distributive leadership are analysed in relation to the RDSB organizational context. Theory and research connected to the two leadership approaches are highlighted. The ADKAR model for change (Hiatt, 2006) is identified as a best fit for advancement of the change and an exploration of Nadler and Tushman's (1989) congruence model allows for consideration of variables within the RDSB such as people, work, and organizational structures and how they impact the problem. This important analysis will lead to a change implementation plan to improve principal support.

Leadership Approach to Change

Using an ethical and distributive leadership approach will allow for a focus on improving supports in the RDSB for principals by sharing leadership roles with central office staff and senior level team who can support the change (Wu & Cormican, 2021). Organizational support structures and processes can lead to positive principal job performance (Starratt, 2005). This will be explored through researching and applying evidenced-based best practices for principal support from high performing districts using an ethical and distributive approach to affect this change.

Ethical Leadership

In order for a strong ethical code in our system to be evident, we require ethical leaders to set a moral culture and climate (Dar & Dar, 2019). Ethical leaders provide long-term value for an organization and its people (Kar, 2014). Brown et al. (2005) define ethical leadership as the “demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication,

reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120). Through exhibiting behaviours such as honesty, consideration of others, fair treatment, and a focus on respect, we can ensure an altruistic focus as an ethical leader where decision-making is driven by morals and values (Brown et al., 2005).

Living the current PoP while completing this OIP has provided a unique opportunity to be fully immersed and to be able to see the issue from a variety of perspectives. Although I am immersed both theoretically and practically in this issue, my approach remains altruistic, and not selfish (Brown et al., 2005). I am driven by the desire to see improvements in our system so that all stakeholders can feel supported and are able to reach their professional and personal goals for the future. In addition, we aim for a system where well-being can be honoured and individual outcomes in the principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) can be a focus to see principals with a high degree of productivity, job satisfaction, morale, motivation, positive health and a strong work-life balance. It is through an ethical lens that this can be achieved. Using my agency as a principal and ethical leader strengthens the change process. Ethical leaders do not just talk “a good game” (p. 113), they follow through as model ethical leaders themselves (Kar, 2014). Lawton & Paez (2014) propose an ethical leadership framework, which connects to the PoP and ethical leadership lens. This framework triangulates purposes, practices and virtues and uncovers the who, why and how of leadership. There is a clear focus on integrity of the leader and relationships with others to achieve outcomes. In this framework, trust as a central focus point and is crucial to see this change process through. A limitation that should be considered with ethical leadership is when a leader’s values differ from that of the organization (Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2017). To ensure that ethical considerations and a strong vision connect the change team leaders to the RDSB, clear communication is necessary as well as an understanding

of the change being positive for student success and well-being. My approach will be supported by this framework and bolstered by a distributive leadership approach.

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership can be described as collective leadership that is shared among stakeholders in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and change (IGI Global, 2022). Distributive leadership requires that a common vision is shared by all and can be aligned with achievable and meaningful goals for the team (Ah-Tech & Cheong Lan, 2014). Leadership goes beyond one individual and a distributive leadership approach allows for sustained change through empowering others, distributing tasks and responsibilities and creating systems for change (Cooper, 2012). There is significant empirical evidence and conceptual support for the practice of distributive leadership guiding effective organizational change (Pont et al., 2008).

This PoP requires significant support and action from many educational leaders and stakeholders and a distributive approach will ensure that the team feels valued in order for their skills to come together and see the change process through. Sharing power and responsibility during a change effort promotes freedom, autonomy and dignity for all in the RDSB (Xu et al., 2021). This issue is not for principals to solve alone, or for a change agent to act as a single blade of grass. A distributive approach will ensure participation and voices from central office staff, senior level team and principals thus allowing for sharing of expertise and a collective vision as a strong basket of support.

As a distributive leader, I can “use the group to change the group” (Theirs, 2017, p. 10). I must tap into the strengths of others and utilize components of the OIP implementation plan so that other leaders are sharing the plan using a team approach (Grant, 2011). I believe that leaders must develop, support and build capacity in others. The ultimate goal when I step away from this

OIP is that the work will continue to flourish in my absence because of the strong leadership in our collaborative culture in RDSB. We can achieve this with a focus on trust, transparency and a culture free of judgement (Theirs, 2017). It is the internal accountability of actors such as other principals, central office staff and senior level staff that will provide for a “constellation of conditions” (Theirs, 2017, p. 9) that will ensure progress is possible both short term and long term. A framework proposed by Spillane (2005) shows that distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice. It is explained that this practice is composed of leaders collaborating in a situation such as a lack of centralized supports.

Limitations of distributed leadership to consider include the issue of leaders involved in the change lacking the ability, expertise, experience and willingness to participate in the change process (Mohd Tahir et al., 2015). Members of the change team will include leaders who are aware of the commitment and necessity to lead collaboratively together. All components in this framework must be understood together to see this change process through.

Relationship Between Leadership Approaches and Organizational Context

Both of these leadership approaches fit well within the organizational context of the RDSB. A collaborative culture is possible where ethics are a central focus. Members of the RDSB team will be guided by an altruistic lens where actions are linked by the criteria of the benefit for others (Ciulla, 2005). This change must be led through an understanding of how closing the gap will positively affect principals, teachers and students. As an ethical and distributive leader, I will focus on a shared moral purpose with all stakeholders. These approaches will help to engage stakeholders who may be resistant through focusing on the importance of interpersonal relationships well as involving multiple actors who will drive the change themselves. Uncovering reasons for any resistance will be vital. My leadership may be

challenged or viewed as self-promoting given my role as a principal in the system and it will be through strong communication of why the change is necessary that I anticipate any possible challenges or resistance through the process. I have courage to put this plan into action involving a collaborative sense of hope that will improve conditions for principals in the RDSB (Tuana, 2014).

Agency

As a principal leader in the RDSB, I have the agency to act as a change initiator, facilitator and implementer in the RDSB (Deszca et al., 2020). It is important for principals to use their agency to effect positive system change. King & Stevenson (2017) emphasize this when they explore the importance for change agents to exemplify courage and a willingness to take risks so that change can be generated effectively. My agency as a principal leader allows me to initiate, support and champion this change through all stages. I am well positioned in my role as a principal to ensure all principal voices are heard through the change process. I have been fortunate to represent all principals as a principal representative member on the senior level team at the RDSB. The senior team consists of the RED, Directors, Mi'kmaw Education Services Coordinator, African Canadian Education Services Coordinator, and two principal representatives. I attend bi-weekly meetings and bring forward items from principals for consideration. Action items are discussed and the team often turns to the two principal representatives for feedback and discussion on how these action items will affect the principal role. Including principal voices on the senior level team is an indication of the high value that the RDSB system places on principals and this is a positive attribute for moving forward with this change process. Limitations to this agency include decision-making with respect to autocratic decisions for the system.

Leadership Approach and Marginalization

In deciding upon a leadership approach for this organizational change, it is important to ensure the protection of values such as democracy, equity and diversity in the RDSB (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017). Ethical leaders promote values such as inclusion, collaboration and social justice (Ehrich et al., 2015). Ethical and distributive leaders seek to avoid marginalization and integrate multiple beliefs, practices and viewpoints. They unearth oppressive practices such as work intensification leading to burnout. The marriage of ethical and distributive leadership for this change seeks to avoid moral blindness, which has been described as an inability to see that unethical actions are occurring (Tuana, 2014). We will create conditions for principals where their well-being can be promoted and their support of teachers and students celebrated.

Ethical and Distributive Leadership Supporting Change Diagnosis

Ethical and distributive leadership supports change diagnosis and uncovering the issue of principal burnout, identifying how to close the gap, and what aspects of the organization require amendment. These approaches are necessary to ensure accountability in the RDSB and are characterized by the moral, ethical and professional dimensions that are likely to produce improvements for this change (Ehrich et al., 2015). Collaborative creativity will be required to respond to the challenging issues uncovered and seeing, thinking and doing things differently for the improved future state (Stoll & Temperley, 2009).

Framework for Leading the Change Process

Type of Change

The change required in RDSB is described as a reactive, overhauling or re-creating type of change due to the change being a response to administrator burnout and the need to improve well-being (Nadler & Tushman, 1989). There is a need to re-evaluate components of how RDSB

supports principals in order to achieve rapid and sustainable change which will impact all parts of the system and take RDSB to a new reality (Deszca et al., 2020). As Leithwood (2011) made clear, improving principal well-being has a clear connection to the well-being and success of the teachers and students in the RDSB. The quality of the principals in our schools has a direct connection to the quality of the teaching and learning.

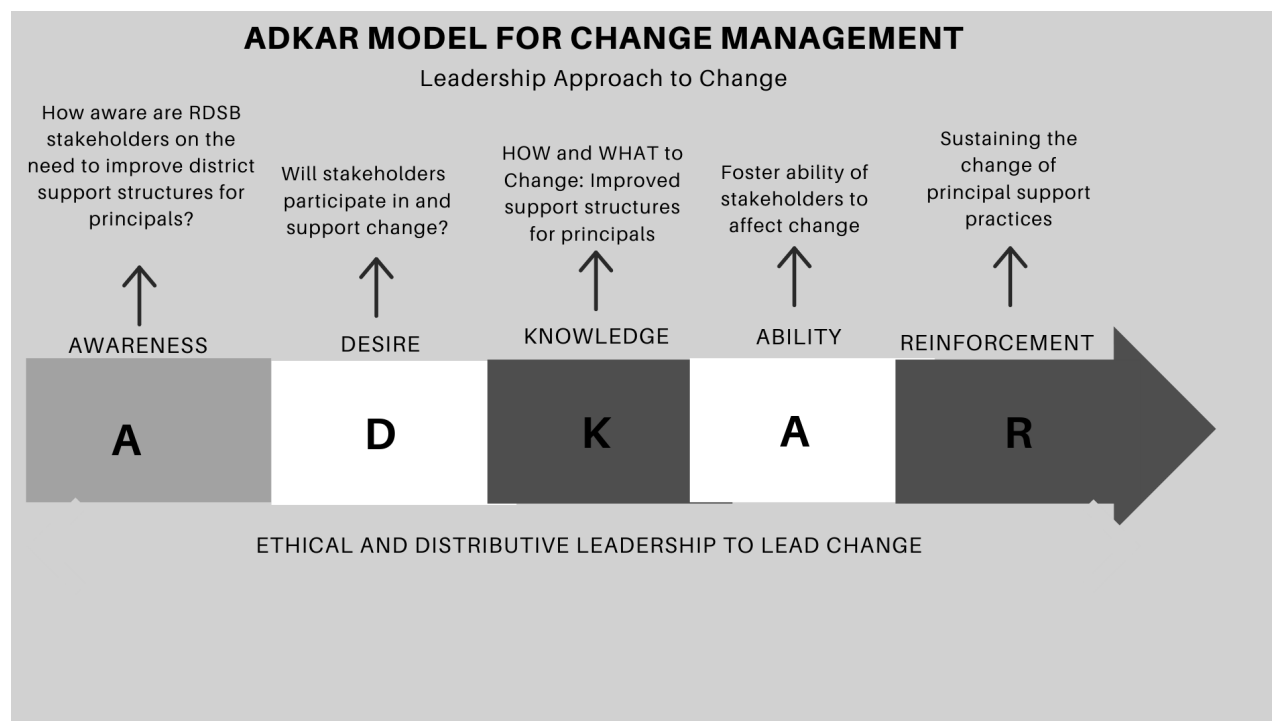
This PoP includes second order change where improving centralized supports for principals involves a new way of seeing things, shifting gears from the current system of support requiring new learning for both principals as well as members of the central office staff (Certification Academy, 2023). This second order change seeks to disrupt the status quo and view the approach to supporting principals in a new and improved way (Coaching Leaders, 2023).

Integrated Change Models for Consideration

If we care to look deeply for change, its potential is constant (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Examining models for organizational change can provide stakeholders and leaders with an opportunity to consider how the change will take place. Using an organizational change model to frame and guide the change can support and guide action for change as well as enhancing our understanding of exactly where to take action (Burke, 2018). Organizational models act as a framework to categorize data into meaningful information, show us what areas of the organization need attention, and assist with guiding the action needed for change to occur (Burke, 2018).

ADKAR Model for Leading the Change Process

The ADKAR model for change management (Hiatt, 2006) supports the OIP change vision and has been adapted in Figure 5 to act as a model for the OIP.

Figure 5*ADKAR Model for Change Management*

Note. ADKAR model for change management (Hiatt, 2006)

The ADKAR model has been used widely and successfully to frame change in organizations and provides a clear structure to follow (Ayudya Paramitha et al., 2020; Bleich & Jones-Schenk, 2019; Goyal & Padwardhan, 2018; Oakley & Sugarman, 2013; Shepherd et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2019). The ADKAR model allows leaders and change teams to understand what will collectively drive change and produce results (Prosci, 2022).

Key Aspects of the ADKAR Model

This model has 5 steps and each step aligns activities associated with change management and goals (Prosci, 2022):

- Awareness: RDSB stakeholders will need to be aware of the need for the change to improve centralized support structures for principals. Communication to promote awareness is key.
- Desire: In order for successful change management, there must be a desire for all stakeholders to participate in the change. This includes principals, senior level team and central office staff.
- Knowledge: Stakeholders require knowledge of how and what to change to improve centralized support structures for principals.
- Ability: We must foster an ability to focus on the skills of actors to affect the change. Expertise of principals, central office staff and the senior level team will guide this process.
- Reinforcement: Strong reinforcement and monitoring of the change as it is sustained will be an on-going focus. Once improved centralized support structures for principals have been implemented, on-going monitoring will be required.

These key steps of the ADKAR model provide clarity for the OIP. The steps are sequential and cumulative and provide a strong vision for framing this change (Prosci, 2022). This framework effectively supports my work as a change agent as it takes into consideration personal and professional advancement during the change for principals as well as other change management participants and the RDSB as a whole. This holistic approach supports equitable outcomes for principals as it considers all aspects of ensuring that the change is successful. This framework appeals to me as a change agent. This model truly allows for a clear focus on the steps that need to happen to improve principal support. The ADKAR model promotes equitable outcomes for this change process as it puts people first and honours both organisational outcomes as well as

personal outcomes for principals. However, the ADKAR model does not take into consideration a vision for the change as part of the process so it will be imperative to ensure the vision remains a priority for the change team through all stages and we can work within this limitation to achieve success. This will be crucial to consider as the initiation of organizational change begins with a vision for the future and a focus on the behaviour needed to see the change through (Burke, 2018).

Alignment with Leadership Approach

Ethical and distributive leadership act as a force for all parts of the change process and ADKAR model. A distributive leadership approach ensures all leaders are driving the change and this is the focus for building capacity in other principals and central office staff (Grant, 2011). Through an ethical approach to leadership, principals can be supported to grow, succeed and reach their fullest human potential (Northouse, 2021). Ethical and distributive leaders are expert communicators throughout the change process and effective listeners to their own inner voice as well as listening to all people involved in the RDSB (Crippen, 2005). Both of these leadership approaches connect with the ADKAR model by honouring the voices of all stakeholders. This ensures that the change process is being led through a collaborative lens which focuses on trust and respect while promoting equitable outcomes of improved principal support in the RDSB.

Organizational Change Readiness

Organizational readiness for change is determined by former change experiences of members, member confidence in leadership and the flexibility of the organization (Descza et al., 2020). It is the responsibility of change leaders to take action and build capacity in others for the change by promoting the merits of the organizational change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Wang

et al. (2020) defines organizational readiness as “a shared psychological state in which organizational members feel committed to implementing an organizational change and have confidence in their collective abilities to do so” (p. 6).

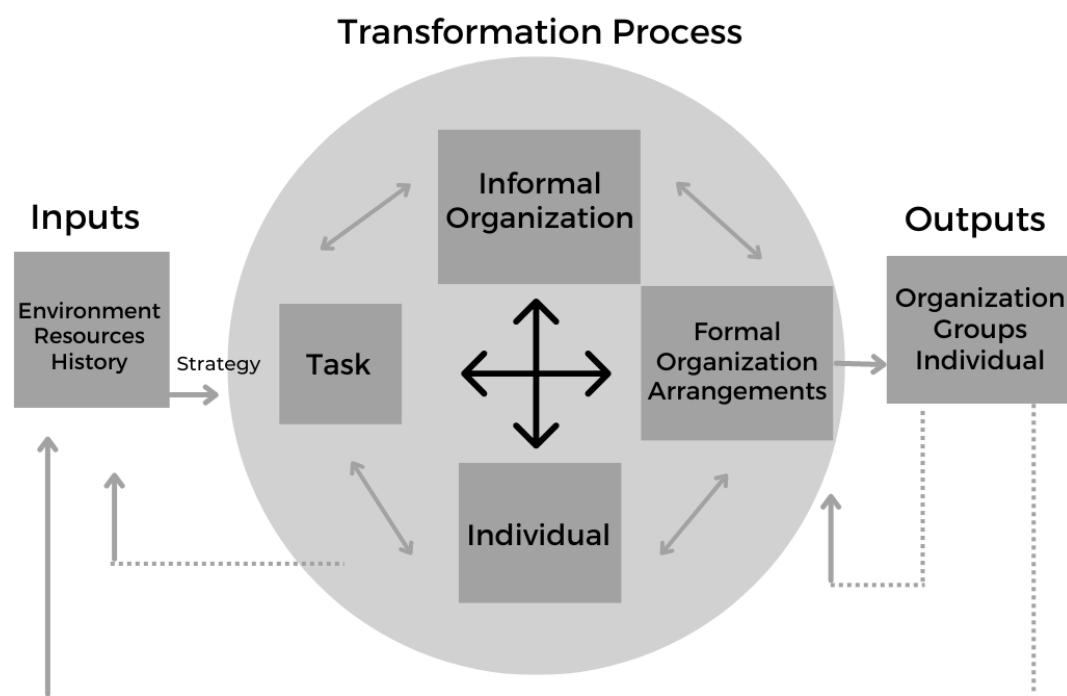
Young et al. (2007) state that far too many districts in North America lack formal support programs for principals. A robust centralized support plan for principals through all of their career transitions needs strengthening in the RDSB (aspiring leader to vice principal, vice principal to principal, and principal to central office positions). There exists a misalignment with principal well-being and current support practices which is rapidly advancing the readiness for the change (Descza et al., 2020).

Nadler and Tushman’s (1989) congruence model (Figure 6) provides a strong framework for analyzing complex organizational problems such as principal burnout and will assist with understanding how the RDSB is functioning (Sabir, 2018). This model will be used to examine the RDSB and its components and gaps to focus on successful reorientation of wraparound principal support and change driven by leaders who can champion the process. This will encourage others to act to support the change. Change efforts based on a defective diagnosis of the issue within the organization are not likely to be successful (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Utilizing this model can give us a clear picture of the effectiveness of RDSB, its component parts, and how well they fit together (Descza et al., 2020). This model highlights that the organization is an open system influenced by both inputs and outputs connected to a transformational process. In this model, strategies are created as a result of the analysis of environment, resources, history, and strategies while the outputs refer to overall system functioning, group behavior, intergroup relations, and individual behavior and effect. This transformational process contains four major components, which alter the inputs into outputs:

task components, individual components, organizational arrangements, and formal organizational arrangements.

Figure 6

Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model



Note. Framework for analyzing organizational problems. Adapted by Sackman, 2016

Input

Inputs describe how the organization is positioned in the educational community. These components include the environment in the RDSB, resources which can be accessed by principals and other stakeholders and the history of the organization.

The Environment

External environmental factors impact the internal organization in the RDSB. These factors play a role in the stability or dynamic nature of the internal organization (Burke, 2018).

RDSB is a small, rural region that has seen a recent influx of individuals from out of province and out of country that have come to settle in the area enticed with dreams of a slower pace and higher quality of life. Major industries include fisheries and forestry and these industries represent the livelihood of many of our students and their families. The area is increasing in cultural diversity within the African Nova Scotian population, local Indigenous population and many recent newcomers to Canada who add significant and much needed diversity to our schools. A Eurocentric and conservative attitude still exists within many communities and on-going important anti-racist and equity work is happening locally and provincially to address this. Schools and towns in the RDSB are largely spaced apart by geography, which impacts principal application interest for certain positions given the barrier of large commutes that can add stress to an already difficult role.

Resources

Resources can create high value in the organization and can include human resources, technology and people (Nadler & Tushman, 1980). There is no active recruitment strategy in the RDSB to attract high quality principal candidates to the region. The Human Resources (HR) department at the RDSB is responsible for the posting of administrative positions, collection of applications, shortlisted scores of applicants and interview procedures. The HR department is responsible for on-boarding once a new individual is hired. After the on-boarding process is complete there is no formalized system of support in place to follow a principal through their career. Experiences differ in principals new to their roles depending on whether they have a history in RDSB or are brand new to the area. When asked about their transition to RDSB into a new principal role, this principal spoke regarding the “New to Administration” info sessions offered and the overall support received in their new role

I do not believe there were any in September/October. So far, I have only gone to the one in December and I found that the topics that were covered would have been useful for me in September. By December, I had already figured out what I needed to do. Overall, while the region was very inclusive and welcoming from the beginning, the general message I got was "reach out if you need anything". Not having taught in this region before, it is very difficult to know what I "need". I think a few inductions days for new administrators would be very useful - going over policy, history, procedures, etc. Some of it was done during the 2 admin days, however, a lot of information was assumed knowledge, which I did not have. I think of my VP now as a mentor because if it wasn't for them, I would not have been able to learn the protocols and procedures as quickly and therefore, would not have been as effective. (personal communication, January 13, 2023)

This experience is contrasted by an individual who transitioned into a new principal role, but had a rich history and multitude of connections in the RDSB:

The transition into my current role as principal is still very much taking place. I took on this position as a term as I haven't been in admin for about 7 years and felt it was time to return to the trenches and see if it was a fit for me. Fortunately, I had worked at the (RDSB) prior to making this move and had many valued connections with colleagues. Having had past admin experience (8 years) combined with the relationships formed during my years as a support/consultant has made an incredible difference in all aspects of my return to school. I have sought out help on a number of occasions and not only knowing who to call but to also have a relationship with many that support the system has helped cut down on wait times, access resources/supports and programming and given

me a sounding board on a number of occasions (personal communication, January 14, 2023).

It is clear that a centralised support system must ensure adequate and consistent support for all principals, regardless of whatever they are brand new to RDSB or have a long career in multiple positions. The principal well-being model highlights the importance of both job resources such as centralized supports, resources, communication, and job conditions combined with personal resources such as a sense of purpose in one's career, a strong self-efficacy and optimism. These personal and job resources must be considered to ensure both new and experienced principals receive these supports to aid in overall principal wellness.

RDSB has a strong team of technology integration and data management folks who are important resources for all principals. When asked how the technology assistance team supports principals, the Tech Coordinator responded that:

The ITSS team members always view the principal as the lead authority on-site at their schools, and so within reason, and pardon the expression, when they say jump, our folks ask how high! In most cases, unless there is a particular relationship that is strained, and as of the moment, I don't think we really have any, I think the perception is that we are very responsive, when prompted by school admin...It's a veteran group...they all know how to respond with empathy and can triage multiple problems where necessary (personal communication, November 23, 2022).

History

The MPED is the overarching power in education in Nova Scotia. The RDSB is divided into four departments under the direction of the Regional Executive Director (RED). Under the Education Act, the RED reports to the Deputy Minister and is accountable for student

achievement and well-being for the students and schools in the RDSB. Although most decision-making is provincially mandated and controlled, application of centralized supports for principals is one aspect of our system that is not consistent from region to region. As part of its business plan, RDSB communicates that on-going support and assistance is provided to school-based principals as required. This support must be strategic, planned and proactive rather than as required. This change process will address this issue.

Transformational Process

Tasks

The task at hand is to improve centralized supports for school administrators and aspiring leaders. This has been explained by Grisson et al. (2021), by showing the:

Impact of an effective principal has likely been *understated*, with impacts being both greater and broader than previously believed: greater in the impact on student achievement and broader in affecting other important outcomes, including teacher satisfaction and retention (especially among high-performing teachers), student attendance, and reductions in exclusionary discipline. (p. 1)

This highlights the grave importance of this change to improve the centralized supports for our principals and aspiring leaders.

People

The effect principals have on the quality of achievement within their schools is significant, and the quality of support provided to our leaders has a direct correlation in the quality of the leaders (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). If we effectively support leaders in our schools, then the effects on student success and achievement can be strengthened for the benefit of all stakeholders (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2009). Individuals

who comprise parts of the system in RDSB include students, families, school staff, community partners, principals, and central office staff. Principals interact with all of these stakeholders on a consistent basis and supporting our students is a collaborative team effort from all involved. People who are able to provide support for this organizational change include principals, senior level team and central office staff from multiple departments

Formal Structures

Formal structures in the congruence model focus on procedures, methods and structures that are developed to get principals to perform tasks to meet school and district level goals (Nadler & Tushman, 1989). Administrator preparatory programs exist provincially (ELCNS, 2021) and this program is a strong component which can complement this OIP. “New to Administration” information sessions have been attempted over the years under the direction of different superintendents but a formal structure is required in order to ensure that each principal has access to the supports they need. Formal structures of support are an element to further develop and improve principal well-being and support.

Informal Structures

Informal structures can often be described as internal politics and social structures, which include the grapevine (Burke, 2018). These have been described by Mindtools (n.d) as unwritten rules that define how work really gets done with a focus on people’s beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviour. Informal structures reflect the way the organizational culture manifests in the RDSB (Descza et al., 2020). Principals in RDSB are seldom asked for their feedback on formal work structures, tasks, meetings and workload. This has created a culture where transparency, trust and open communication are lacking. The informal culture of RDSB will be strengthened by improving centralized support structures for principals.

Output

Improving principal support creates positive output, which links back to the collaborative vision we have in the RDSB to strengthen with intention our support of students and staff. In order for well-being and achievement of students to be maximized, we must make system supports for principals a priority. A good understanding of the organizational effectiveness is critical. This understanding will promote system effectiveness, group performance/communication and individual behaviour. The focus of this OIP is clearly linked to improved student achievement, teacher effectiveness and overall principal well-being. If our school leaders have improved support structures, the equitable output in our system benefits. After diagnosing readiness for organizational change, possible solutions can be explored to determine what is the best fit for implementation on this change journey.

Figure 7

RDSB Organizational Readiness for Change

RDSB Organizational Readiness for Change

READINESS	RESOURCES	ENVIRONMENT	HISTORY
HIGH	✓	✓	
MEDIUM			✓
LOW			

Note. RDSB readiness for change categories based on the Nadler and Tushman congruence model

Figure 7 shows where the RDSB is situated in terms of readiness for change based on the congruence model.

Holt (2002) developed a readiness for change scale based on four beliefs among employees. He identified factors for ensuring readiness in an organizational with a change process. These include the knowledge that we can implement the change, the change is appropriate for the RDSB, leaders and principals are committed, and the proposed change is needed. These two change readiness assessments have shown a high readiness for implementation of this change with individuals in the RDSB who have the abilities and skills to see this change through.

Within the environment, it is clear that improving principal support is a priority because we need to improve principal well-being as well as consider the important connection to the strength of principals in schools with student success and well-being.

Improving support structures for principals connects directly to an ethics of caring (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The organization acts like a family, where compassion and concern for principals is a primary purpose and “ethical glue” (p. 392) that holds the RDSB together. Diagnosing readiness of an organization connects strongly to uncovering ethics and the commitments of all stakeholders involved in this change. Bolman and Deal (2017) also explain that in pursuit of an ethics of justice for organizational change, it is crucial to honour the voices of those affected most by the change in order to promote a sense of fairness. This would include principals and central office staff as they will be key actors with the change.

As a change agent, I will have a key role in cultivating buy-in from senior leadership in the RDSB and I am well positioned to provide stewardship to promote principal well-being and lobby towards a continual focused commitment by the RDSB for ethical responsibilities and moral actions of all stakeholders to see this change through (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

The history of the organization and changes to the provincial structure will not be a barrier to this issue and need for change. The proposed change is necessary and we must work within the limitations of current structure and organizational history to move forward utilizing a lens of ethical caring and justice.

Strategies/Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

This OIP requires significant action from educational stakeholders, school district leaders and principals in order to address the widening gap of school leader burnout and the supports and practices needed to retain current leaders while cultivating new leaders through succession planning (Cieminski, 2015).

Improving centralized support structures for principals will allow for optimal student achievement and well-being, development of future principals, support the entry of principals into their complex roles, and ensure our current principals have the tools to affect positive change in their schools.

Change Drivers

Fullan (2021) explains that systems change when there are degrees of dissatisfaction at all levels such as school administrators leaving the role at such an alarming rate and strong aspiring leaders avoiding moving into administrative roles. A critical shift is required in order to move our district into a culture where we support adequately the principals collaboratively in our system.

Northouse identifies the following antecedent conditions, which are drivers for change process. These include: Context and Culture, Leader Attributes, and Follower Receptivity (Northouse, 2021, p. 259). These connect strongly with the factors included in the Congruence

Model. The envisioned future state of improved centralized supports for principals will be materialized with consideration for these conditions through a collaborative change process.

Possible Solutions

Thomas & Kearney (2010) reported that a long term, cross-organizational commitment in creating and implementing a system of support for aspiring leaders and current school administrators is necessary. Possible solutions to this issue include a clear onboarding process for new administrators, a formal mentoring strategy for administrators, creation of a centralized document sharing system, and formal support for principals in how to identify and support aspiring leaders.

Each solution is explored, compared, and contrasted below to determine the most appropriate solution for our current district context.

Solution #1 – New Principal Induction Program

When a new administrator is hired, whether it be a teacher moving into a vice principal role, a vice principal becoming a principal or an out of province or district administrator moving into a new role, a process of support once onboarding is complete is crucial. In the current system, there is no formalized induction program and as a result many of our new principals - using a learning to swim analogy - rather than being taught to swim, are simply tossed into the deep end of the pool and are left treading water with no direction or life preserver available. Some learn awkwardly and frantically to swim and others struggle to stay afloat.

A strong induction program can be used to emphasize high expectations for leadership in our schools to ensure this is the norm in RDSB (Cieminski, 2015). There have been recent attempts in the RDSB to host information sessions for new administrators but this has had its

challenges and has not gained the momentum it needs, although the efforts and intention are noble.

The vision behind an induction program must be clear: introduce school administrators to their positions, schools, districts, organizational structure, resources available, goal setting, and a clear entry plan (Anderson, 2015). The RDSB new administrator induction program needs to be a formalized program with clear procedures.

An example is provided by Anderson (2015) in which sessions are included before the start of school year and include professional development, presentations by departments and connection to mentors. The induction program would require monthly sessions throughout the year as well as ongoing mentorship opportunities for new principals.

Resources needed for this induction program include the commitment of district leaders to organize the program and a team of principals to support and champion this work. Best research-based practices for induction programs will need to be further explored by the induction team and a determination of financial requirements to meet the needs of the induction program will have to be explored.

Solution #2 – Mentoring Strategy for Principals

Life as a principal can be lonely and overwhelming, especially for those new to the role. There is a vast body of educational research to support the need for formal mentoring opportunities for both new and experienced school administrators (Anderson, 2015; Bush & Chew, 1999; Carrol, 2015; Cieminski, 2015; Dicke et al., 2022; Garcia, 2011; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Patterson Felicello, 2014; Parylo et al., 2012; Retelle, 2010; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). A key theme emerging from this research includes that the mentoring program must be formalized, strategic and consistent from year to year.

In the RDSB, formal mentoring of principals does not occur. This solution focuses on the need for a robust strategy to be created whereby new principals and those new to positions have mentoring opportunities to be paired with a seasoned leader (Parylo et al., 2012). Parylo et al. (2012) report that this mentoring is crucial to the success of the principal and promotes the sustainability of leadership in the school system, which can be connected to overall student achievement. The mentor must be carefully matched with the mentee to allow for trust, openness and ongoing commitment (Garcia, 2011).

Consideration should be made to exploring best mentoring practices within strong systems. For example, the Vermont Mentoring Initiative is a robust, well-respected and successful mentoring program for new administrators for their first two years that provides support, guidance, and works to turn challenges experienced in school administration roles into opportunities and excellence (Vermont Principals Association, 2022).

Financial resources to be considered by the senior level team are days in lieu for mentors as well as substitute coverage for both mentors and mentees to be able to meet.

Solution #3 – Creation of a Principal Wiki as a Central Location for Document Sharing

Many principals are overwhelmed with the amount of policies, procedures, paperwork, and other information that they are expected to master. Some of these important documents become hidden in emails, district websites and office filing systems. A Google sharing site and Google classroom for some documents currently exists for principals in the RDSB but it is not a comprehensive repository for everything a principal needs. Anderson (2015) conducted research showing how useful a centralized sharing system, such as a Principal Wiki can be for principals.

A Wiki is a collaborative webpage and document-sharing tool that principals can contribute to or edit (Guhlin, 2008). In Anderson's (2015) research, the Principal Wiki was the

most reported useful tool for principals. If this solution was developed and implemented in the RDSB, it would include items such as beginning of year forms, lockdown and fire drill information, principal meeting minutes, policies and procedures, and a central sharing system for multiple departments to share documentation critical for school administrators to easily access (Transportation, Human Resources, Coaches/Interventionists, Student Services, Operations, Technology integration, etc). These departments would be able to come together in support of principals having the tools they need to effectively run their schools. Currently, many of these forms exist on the RDSB website but are difficult to find and not always updated. In the RDSB, this tool would be a “one-stop shop” for new and seasoned principals to ensure ease of access and a timely approach, respecting the plethora of decisions being made each minute at schools.

The principal Wiki sharing site would need to be organized and accompanied with additional training, conversation and discussion (Anderson, 2015). Currently, each department in the RDSB is well versed in their departmental documents and procedures whereas principals are responsible for in-depth knowledge of all of these. We could develop a streamlined system, which honours principals’ time and high levels of burnout.

Guhlin (2008) demonstrates the importance of bringing all of these small bits of info into a larger, common space: “The fox knows many things, goes the old saying, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Many school districts never realize how many things they are involved in until they write them down in one place” (p. 8). This streamlined solution is an appropriate step to honour the magnitude of responsibilities involved in the principal role and the necessity for items to be organized centrally and easily accessed by all new and experienced principals.

An important resource for this solution includes members of the RDSB technology team being accessible and relied up on for support to get the Wiki up and running with a strong plan of maintenance.

Solution #4 – Support for Principals in Identifying and Supporting Aspiring Leaders

Supporting the development of future leaders is a crucial aspect of succession planning. Current in the RDSB, aspiring leaders can self-select into a one-year aspiring leadership program. This program has modules which prepare aspiring leaders for the role as well as a practicum experience where they shadow a principal. There is a lack of guidance for principals to be supported in understanding the importance of identifying and guiding strong teacher leaders.

In Cieminski's (2015) study, it was reported that tapping (the act of a principal identifying and informing a teacher who demonstrates qualities that show a position in school leadership could be a good fit for the future) had a significant impact on a teacher's interest in becoming a school leader. It was also reported that principals and school district leaders were underutilizing the power of tapping that could help develop our future principals.

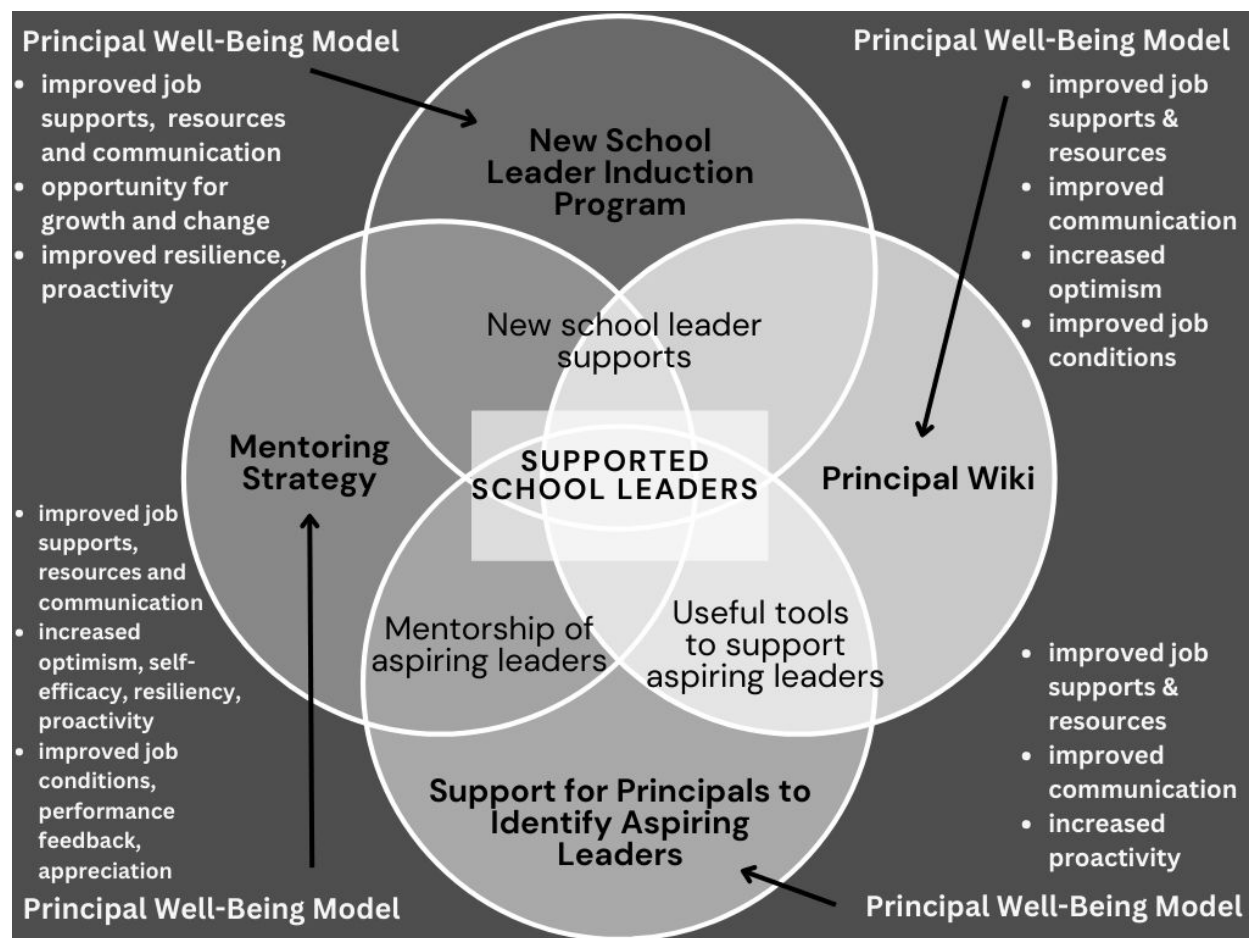
How do we support our school principals in knowing what skills to look for in an aspiring leader? Cieminksi (2015) describes the skills to look for as including: creating an excitement for learning, being adaptable, having a continuous improvement mind-set, being collaborative, valuing teamwork, caring by putting students first, and being accountable for student results.

The RDSB needs to provide support for training and communication with principals regarding the identifiable skills and intentional ways to support aspiring leaders other than simply directing them to the program.

Resources needed include the agreement of school district leaders and principals to take more of an active role in supporting aspiring leaders to ensure the right teacher leaders are moving into these roles given the multifaceted context of the role today.

Figure 8

Possible Solutions to Support Principals in RDSB



Note. Figure 8 was created to visualize the four possible solutions to the PoP and overlapping themes. Aspects of the principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) are connected and compared to all solutions and its components are highlighted with each solution. All solutions fit well with the model and each solution has overlapping themes with other proposed solutions.

Each of the solutions aligns with each other as a useful tool and possible solution to the PoP. All are centralized support structures that can promote succession and retention and avoid continuing down a path of administrator burnout and continued vacancies in positions.

A clear mentoring strategy supports both aspiring leaders, as well as new administrators. It has been reported that mentoring is not only crucial for new administrators but is a professionally satisfying experience for the seasoned leaders who become mentors (Cieminski, 2015). This can act as strong professional development to keep the experienced leader well versed in effective practices and changes in the system, which are also beneficial to student achievement.

The use of a principal Wiki benefits aspiring leaders, new leaders and experienced leaders. It provides an accessible resource for all to utilize and will be a useful tool to be shared and discussed in aspiring leadership programs, induction programs and mentoring programs.

The benefits to all four solutions are clearly linked to positive change in the RDSB. The on-boarding strategy is explicitly linked to mentoring, the Wiki, and support of our aspiring leaders. These solutions work in harmony and act as the four legs to a table; they work together to create a level, sturdy, and supportive structure.

One solution will emerge after an analysis of all four as the most promising to implement with effectiveness in the RDSB.

Rational for Chosen Solution

Figure 9 provides an analysis into resources needed for each solution as well as a look into components of the principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) and how connected each solution is to the components of the model. Criteria included are: resources needed for the

solution, the solution being supportive of principal well-being, opportunity for performance feedback within the solution, and looking at opportunities for professional growth.

Figure 9

Analysis of Possible Solutions

Analysis of Solutions

Guided by the Principal Well-Being Model

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	RESOURCES NEEDED	SUPPORTS PRINCIPAL WELL-BEING	PROVIDES PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK	ALLOWS FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH
Induction Program	● LOW ▲ MED ★ HIGH ■ MED	✓		✓
Mentoring Program	● MED ▲ LOW ★ HIGH ■ HIGH	✓	✓	✓
Principal Wiki	● LOW ▲ HIGH ★ HIGH ■ MED	✓		
Support for Identification of Aspiring Leaders	● LOW ▲ LOW ★ HIGH ■ HIGH	✓		✓

● = FISCAL NEEDS
★ = HUMAN NEEDS
■ = TIME NEEDS
▲ = TECH NEEDS

Note. After examining potential solutions to this PoP, although all of the options emerge as important and viable, a formal mentorship program comes out as the most promising solution to improve supports and well-being for principals and as a result, outcomes for students. It aligns with supporting principal well-being, providing performance feedback and allows for optimal opportunities for growth.

While all of these solutions address the issue of principal well-being, a robust mentorship strategy connects with all important components of the principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) including supporting opportunities for growth and providing on-going feedback to principals.

Resources needed to create a mentorship program are manageable with support from the senior level team at RDSB and experienced principals who would act as mentors. A formal mentorship program can include various aspects of the other solutions. As indicated in the Venn diagram in Figure 8, creating a mentorship program goes hand-in-hand with supporting principal induction. Because these two solutions are so closely intertwined, the RDSB could include an induction component as part of its mentorship program. Although not emerging as the chosen solution, support for principals to identify aspiring leaders must remain a priority for the RDSB.

The proposed formal solution of a mentoring program would be designed to support the RDSB strategic direction by enhancing administrator effectiveness, accountability and efficiency while meeting the social, emotional and professional needs of our school administrators and aspiring leaders (Descza et al., 2020).

A mentorship program connects strongly to ethical leadership through the need for a focus on integrity, justice, morality and good will (Ekinci, 2015). Distributive leadership forms the backbone of a formalized mentorship program as it requires an effective team to come together and support principals. This solution will contribute to building momentum and buy-in for the change as it will have a beneficial effect on multiple parts of the system, ultimately reverberating down positively to students and teachers.

I am driven by the following key strategies as I uncover best practices for a formal mentorship program for principals in the RDSB: conceptualizing a vision for the future, recognizing that emotional healing is necessary, helping principals grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering and creating value for the RDSB and its principals (Northouse, 2021).

Gaps have been identified between our current reality in the RDSB and what is required to bring much needed alignment to support the principal role (Descza et al., 2020). As a change

leader, I have momentum, agency and passion as an ethical and distributive leader to bring the proposed solution to fruition in order for the RDSB to be a leader in principal support practices.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 has provided context for the urgency of moving forward with a change implementation plan utilizing an ethical and distributive leadership approach. Analysis of the presented solutions reveals the optimal solution will uncover important job resources for principals such as improved supports, resources, communication, job conditions, performance feedback, opportunities for growth and change, and an overall sense of feeling appreciated. These improved job resources help to support a principal's own personal resources. These job resources and personal resources work in harmony to promote positive individual and organizational outcomes while promoting and honouring principal well-being.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation and Communication

The first two chapters of this OIP focused on analysis of the organizational context, elaboration of the focused Problem of Practice (PoP), and determination of the chosen solution, which is supported by the ADKAR change model. This chapter will articulate the implementation plan of a formal mentoring strategy for RDSB, a change process evaluation strategy as well as an effective communication plan to ensure stakeholder support and on-going commitment to this change process. This final chapter concludes with an exploration of next steps, future considerations and a narrative epilogue for reflection.

Change Implementation Plan

The goal of this OIP is to increase principal well-being and avoid burnout by providing improved centralized supports. After analysis of possible solutions to this issue, employing a formal mentoring program in the RDSB has emerged as the optimal solution.

The change plan and principal mentoring initiative aligns with the overall organizational strategy of RDSB to ensure that effective and supportive principals lead our schools in RSDB. The hierarchical structure in RDSB can be used to ensure that this remains a focus for the future with the senior level team supporting these on-going change efforts.

RDSB Mentoring Change Team

An essential element for change implementation is the creation of a small group or team who will lead the change (Zins & Illback, 2007). A change team will be initiated and will include principals, vice principals, a member from HR, and members of senior level team. Principals and Vice Principals will volunteer to be part of the change team. A mixture of new and experienced administrators will be sought from all levels (elementary, junior high and high school). It is important to engage and empower principals to participate and collaborate in achieving the

envisioned future state of a strong mentoring program. We will shift the culture where support is the norm and we will build capacity in our system so that new principals receiving this support will consider becoming a mentor themselves in the future. It is important to ensure no one feels excluded when this change team is brought together. It will be inclusive and open to all principals and vice principals who wish to be part of this change process. The goal of the change team is a focus on developing trust and dedication to improve principal supports in RDSB (Dudar et al., 2017). I will lead the change team through my ethical and distributive leadership lens and will take on the role to make certain effective communication early on as well as ensure the development of a strong mentoring change team. Resources required that will need to be explored include lieu days for principals if meetings occur during the summer break, mentoring professional development for mentors, and the investigation of possible administrative support by central office staff. Inquiries will be made about mentorship training for key principal members of the team so that in-house mentorship training can occur in future years.

It is important to note that there are currently significant changes occurring in the senior level team for RDSB, with the RED recently moving to a new position outside of RDSB. A retired interim RED has been brought on for this position. This individual is very supportive of improving principal support practices. The Director position has also recently been filled with a new individual. Both of these individuals will be part of the change team. These changes are significant to consider in regards to communication in a timely manner to ensure their feedback and support while honouring the timeline for implementation.

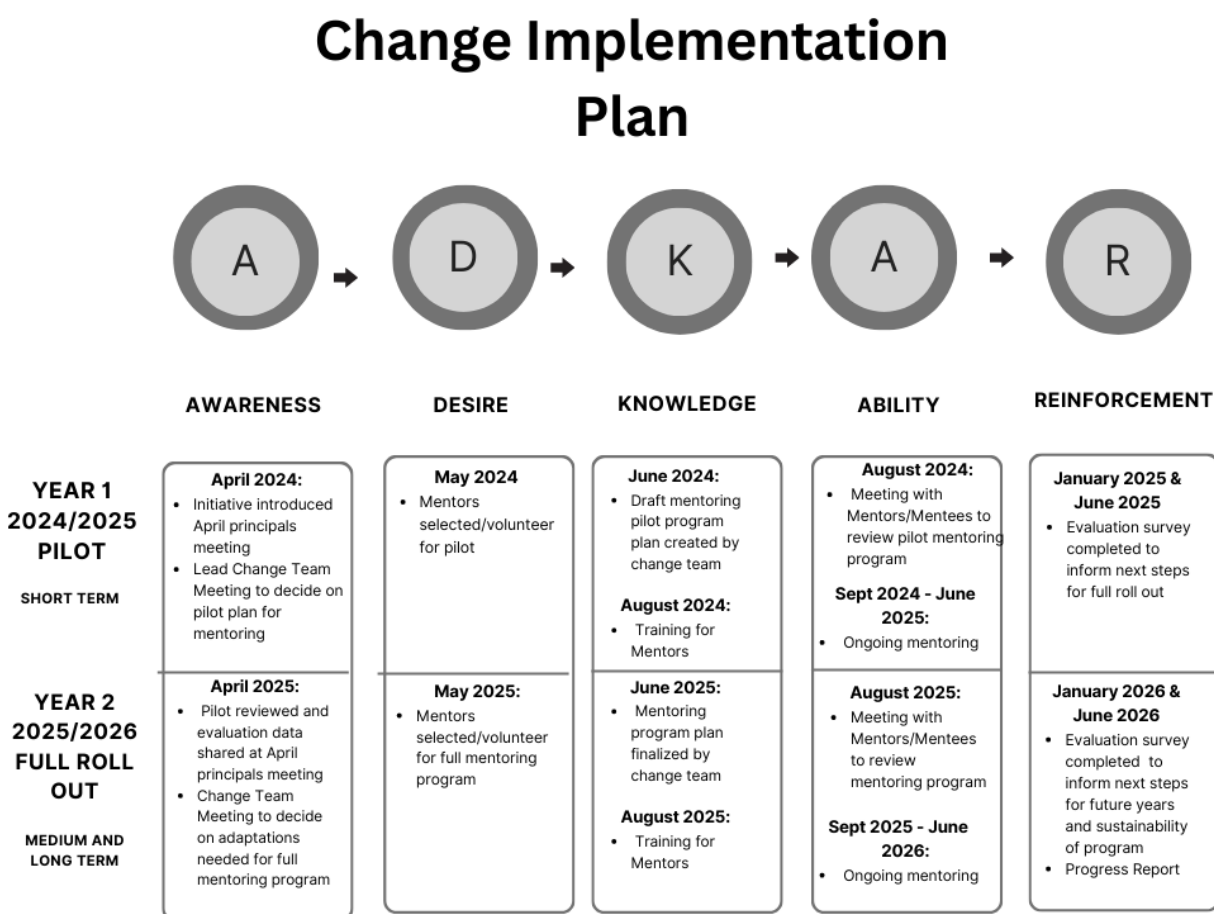
ADKAR Model Supports Change Implementation

The ADKAR change model (Prosci, 2022) supports management of the transition into implementation and the overall change process (see Figure 10). Short, medium and long-term

goals are important in the implementation of change. Studies have shown that a change process is best supported with a pilot project, which then leads to on-going change implementation and change innovation (Chiaroni & Frattini, 2011). The structure to support these goals for this mentoring program include a year-long pilot program followed by a full year mentoring program. Extensive feedback from mentors/mentees in both year phases of the program will be a focus. This feedback and anticipated alteration of the mentoring program will allow for the future state of improved principal support and well-being to be achieved.

Figure 10

Change Implementation Plan



Note. Dates will be confirmed by the RDSB change planning team.

This implementation plan guided by the ADKAR model has a 2-year goal with the first year acting as a pilot program in order to make adjustments and identify strengths for the full roll out of the mentoring program the following school year. The pilot program will be a smaller version of the full program and will include a smaller number of mentors and mentees to make certain continual process improvement with implementation is discovered and altered for a strengthening of the medium and long-term nature of the mentoring program.

It will be important during the change implementation plan to consider and manage any potential issues that may arise. Because the plan is a multi-year plan, we must consider position changes of both change team members as well as mentors to new positions both inside and outside of RDSB. It will be critical to ensure succession of new team members if current members move to a new position away from the RDSB, and that we are prepared with a plan to bring new members on board. Furthermore, a common mistake made by some change agents is moving too quickly (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). This highlights the need for the pilot year to verify issues that arise can be altered before the full roll out the following year.

Change Implementation in the ADKAR Knowledge and Ability Stages

It is important in the knowledge stage to make sure we provide our change team and stakeholders with the knowledge of how to implement and support this change process (Wong et al, 2019). This will include training for mentors and exploration of best research practices and programs for principal mentoring.

Understanding clearly the skills and strengths that our principals possess in order to implement the change with success will be vital. They will use the knowledge gained from training sessions and put this into practice with a strong mentoring strategy.

Resistance to Change

The implementation phase can often be marked by high levels of stress for those involved in the change (Goncalves & Campos, 2018). Issues can arise such as resistance to the change during this phase and it is important for change agents to be prepared to support this process. For numerous reasons, stakeholders involved in change initiatives can react by passively resisting the change, forcefully trying to undermine the change, or wholeheartedly embracing the change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). It is further explained by Kotter & Schlesinger (2008) that this resistance often occurs because of a misunderstanding of the change. This can greatly affect implementation and will be considered when planning with the change team. Asking principals to participate as mentors in a formalized mentoring program may be seen by some as adding to an already overfilled plate. This highlights the need to protect principals' time in the form of offering advanced reporting days or days in lieu for training before school begins as well as ample substitute support for any part of the mentoring strategy that will pull them away from their own schools. Gathering feedback in the pilot year of implementation will be crucial to ensure buy in for the full rollout and sustainability in later years. Taking into consideration that change is a complex process that will not appear predictable and linear is also critical in order to reach our desired future state (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Principals must be the central driving force in this change and their feedback will be honoured and sought out.

Equity and Social Justice

The planned change aims to create an improved positive culture shift for principals. A focus on maintaining a safe and non-threatening mentoring program where trust and support are a focus will allow for diversity of voices to be heard and honoured through the process (Austin & Harkins, 2008).

Plan to Communicate the Need for Change and the Change Process

Effective communication is an essential component of all change initiatives (Beatty, 2015). Communication must occur at all steps of the change process. Beatty (2015) explains that the communication must make clear the “why” regarding the change backed by empirical research, the “what”, including what is in for stakeholders, and finally the “how” which are the details of how to improve principal well-being and support with this specific mentoring strategy. The ADKAR model highlights the need for communication with all stakeholders in the awareness and desire stages.

Communication in the ADKAR Stages of Awareness and Desire

Communication to promote awareness of why, what and how we will implement the change is key to engagement and success. Ensuring all stakeholders understand the need for this change to improve centralized support for principals is a key facet to be able to move forward with a robust mentoring program. Strong communication can confirm that there is a desire among all members of the change team to participate in the change as well as other stakeholders who want to support the change.

Effective communication will form the backbone of this change process in RDSB and result in improved support practice for principals. Individuals who will be engaged in this change include decision makers such as senior level team, human resources personnel, and the following influencers: principals, and central office staff. We will also employ the expertise and support of the RDSB Communications Officer who can provide advice and skill development in order to mobilize a strong communication strategy to support the change.

Democratic, supportive and open communication will be a collaborative focus to make certain shared participation and all voices are honoured (De Nobile & Aysin Bilgin, 2022). All

members of the change team will be involved in both external and internal communication. External communication will focus on communicating to external stakeholders such as parents and guardians and the general public with increased frequency, trust, and clarity about the need for this change and the process to support it (Lahiff & Hatfield, 1978). External stakeholders deserve to understand why there is need for the change and how the change process will be facilitated, promoted and maintained. Lahiff and Hatfield (1978) also examine the importance of internal communication where the change team is seeking input from principals rather than top-down communication and directives coming consistently from the MPDOE and the senior team of RDSB.

Without clear communication, major barriers are created which can lead to self-interest, maintaining the status quo, creating needless risks and not welcoming the change process (Van Praet & Van Leuven, 2022). As a change agent, I will promote the skill development of the people around me using a distributive leadership approach to support on-going communication. Harnessing effective communication skills will assist all decision makers and influencers through the process. We can collaboratively achieve this by sending clear, precise and timely communication, using multiple channels of communication that empower others and allow for collaboration (Raina & Roebuck, 2016; Rita Men & Sung, 2022). At the core of this change process, we must honour and promote all voices through our communication strategy.

Formats for communication must be carefully considered while focusing on the needs of the stakeholders (Dudar et al., 2017). Specific strategies for communicating the change process will involve face-to-face meetings with presentations at principal meetings and focus groups with large and small groups of mentors and mentees. We will also use surveys, emails and a social media strategy to make both internal and external stakeholders aware of the change initiative

(Rita Men & Sung, 2022). Strong internal communication includes strategic, on-going, and clear communication that can help with managing any resistance that occurs as well as negative emotions that may be linked to the change journey (Duffy & Chance, 2007). Being immersed in the issue of principal burnout and wellness can be emotionally draining for many people. Burnout impacts life both at home and at work; and this must be considered when developing appropriate ways of communicating with all stakeholders in order to honour these emotions and proceed in a respectful way.

The Minnesota Department of Education (2019) highlights the importance of stakeholder buy in and suggests that change agents should make clear the reason for the change, incorporate on-going communication at each stage of the change process, and focus on the importance of two-way communication to honour the voices of all stakeholders. This feedback loop can be successful using an ethical and distributive lens as both of these leadership approaches honours individual lived experiences.

This OIP will utilize the communication framework suggested by Deszca et al. (2020) which focuses on four phases in the communication plan:

- Pre-change approval: Change leader discussions with principals and senior level team about the PoP
- Developing the need for change: Creation of the RDSB Change Team and confirmation of mentoring strategy and timelines
- Midstream change and milestone communication: Utilizing principals meetings to provide in person updates about mentoring strategy and connections with mentors and mentees about milestones and next steps

- Confirming and celebrating the change success: Through reports, emails and in person communication at meetings

These phases will help to continue to build awareness of the PoP and create accountability for members of the change team, mentors and mentees.

Dudar et al. (2017) suggests the following important questions for consideration with a communication strategy during a change process. The questions have been altered to fit the mentoring initiative and will act as a guide for change team communication and change process:

- Who needs to know this information regarding the mentoring strategy?
- What information will principals find motivating and useful? Why?
- What is the feedback plan for mentees and mentors to respond to?
- What mode of communication do people prefer?
- When will communication happen? (pre-change, during, post-change)
- What supports are necessary for our mentors and mentees?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of our change team?
- What funding do we have access to for this change?

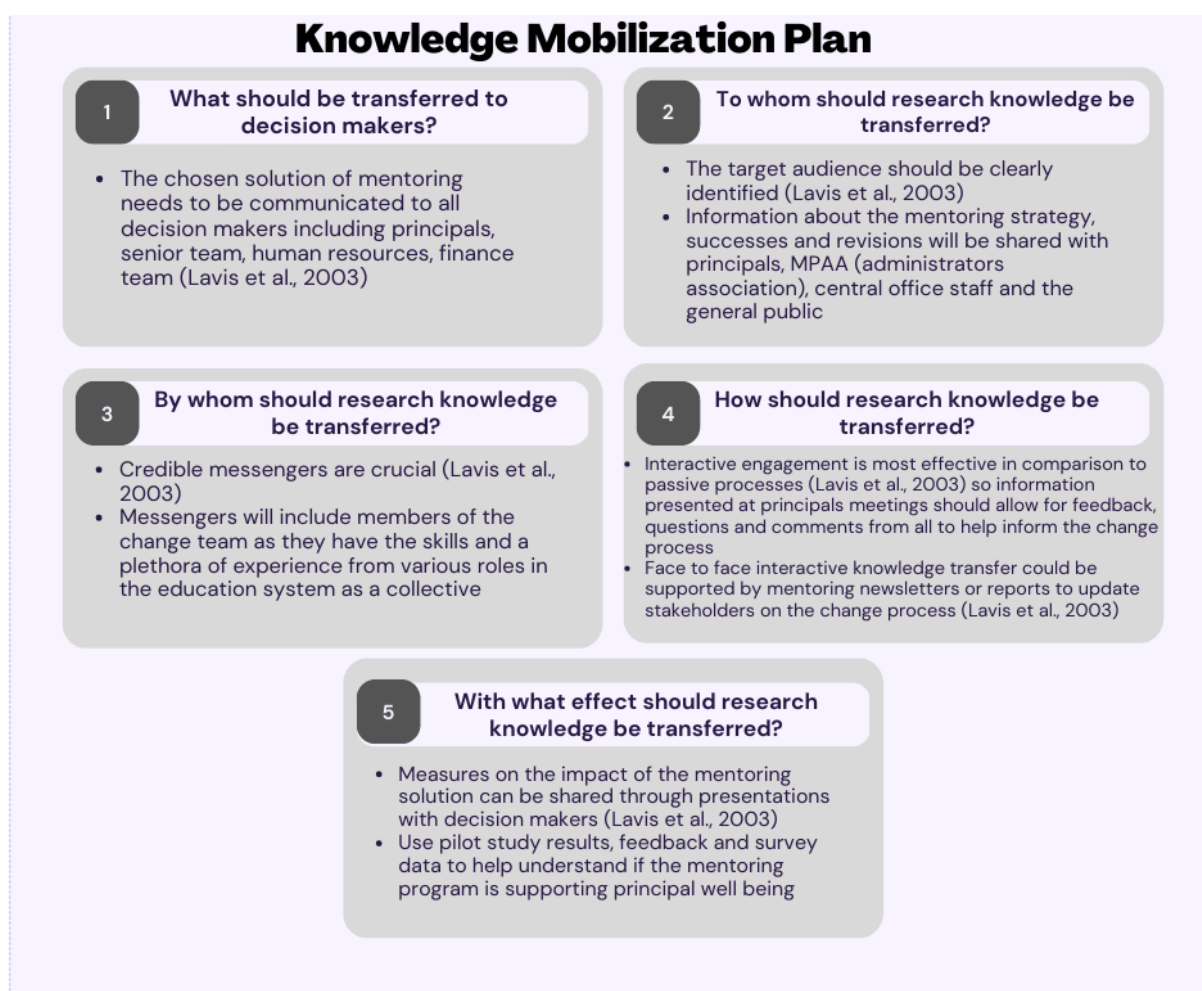
Knowledge Mobilization Plan

Lavis et al. (2003) recommends a clear knowledge mobilization plan to support effective communication and organizational change efforts. They explain that this plan is an essential element for an effective knowledge-transfer strategy and is achieved through clear communication. The Knowledge Institute (2019) clarifies that “knowledge mobilization is not just about disseminating information. It’s not just about sharing, or publishing, or one-way information flow. It is about engagement, end-user participation and attention to impact” (p. 1). This highlights the need for two-way communication between members of the change team and

other stakeholders. Lavis et al (2003) describes that the knowledge mobilization plan will address the importance of the solution to be communicated to all stakeholders, the target audience be clearly identified (principals, aspiring leaders, senior team, central office staff), the messengers of the information be driven by the change team, and that a clear engagement process for communication of the goals be made clear. The knowledge mobilization plan for this change process is described in Figure 11 below:

Figure 11

Knowledge Mobilization Plan



Note. Adapted from Lavis et al. (2003)

Path of Change, Milestones and Celebrations

Beatty (2015) suggests a communication model that would highlight the path of change, milestones, and celebrations along the change process. He recommends this can be achieved using newsletters, reports, fact sheets, meetings, and emails. All of these will be considerations for the change team to see that adequate feedback and information is communicated to all.

A sample report structure after the first pilot year with steps recommended by Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) would include:

1. Mentoring Program Overview – context and background of the program.
2. Program Theory – outlining expected changes and results. Include evaluation questions.
3. Methodology – How are we monitoring and evaluating the mentoring program?
4. Key Results – Program outcomes and sustainability. Present data (quantitative and qualitative) and evaluation conclusions.
5. Recommendations – focused on program continuation and/or improvement.
6. Learning – lessons learned and next steps.

This report will be a positive communication tool as it will make clear the strengths and needs of the pilot program and guide the RDSB Change Team on next steps for the full roll out the following school year.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

Having a monitoring and evaluation framework is essential for change teams to ensure accountability and establish progress and results (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

In order to understand whether this mentoring initiative has actually made an improvement to principal well-being and support in the RDSB, we will need clear and specific

measures to determine this (Shakman, Bailey & Breslow, 2017). The ADKAR model highlights this in the reinforcement stage.

Monitoring and Evaluation in the ADKAR Stage of Reinforcement

Prosci's (2022) best practices in change management research shows that planning for reinforcement is critically important, especially when it comes to achieving project results. Taylor (2023) explains the importance of the ADKAR reinforcement stage not being missed in organizational change.

In a Prosci (2022) study that Taylor highlights, of the participants who planned for reinforcement in their change initiative, 67% met or exceeded their objectives. Of the individuals who did not plan for reinforcement, only 55% met their objectives. The reinforcement stage can often get missed and it is the responsibility of the change team to ensure it remains a priority for this change process. We need to elicit feedback from mentees, mentors and members of the change team.

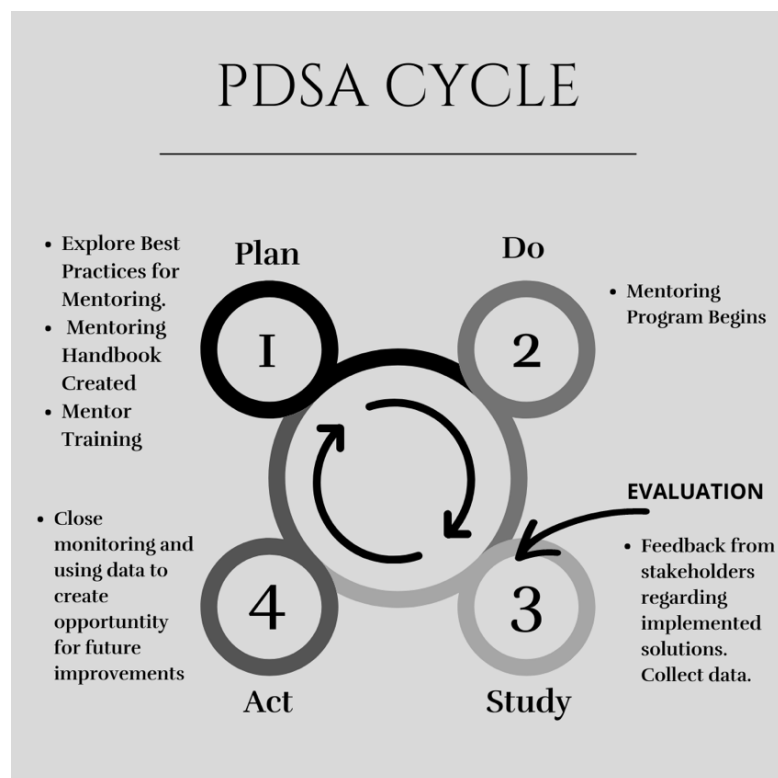
Leaders and other stakeholders involved in the change will participate in close monitoring during all parts of the change process. Implementing measurement and control processes will play an important role and will affect the direction and outcomes achieved by the mentoring change process (Deszca et al., 2020).

PDSA Inquiry Cycles for Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring will help us understand where we are, observe change, use on-going assessments for feedback, and participate in routine reflection (Selener, 1997). As a reflective practitioner and change agent, I will promote reflection and feedback as crucial parts of our process. The PDSA cycle (Demings, 1993) will be used to support the monitoring and evaluation process as an inquiry cycle (Figure 12).

Figure 12

PDSA Model (Plan, Do, Study, Act)



Note. Principal Mentoring PDSA Inquiry Cycle adapted from Deming (1993)

Langley et al. (2009) reported that the PDSA cycle is designed to answer the following questions: What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know if the change is an improvement? What changes will we make that will result in an improvement? These questions will drive the measurement and control systems and must be incorporated into change initiatives throughout the cycle (Descza et al., 2020).

This mentoring change process requires a clear multi year plan to be effective. I will need to utilize my ethical and distributive leadership skills to confirm assessment measures with the change team and build commitment into the PDSA cycle, ensuring they support collaborative decision making (Descza et al., 2020).

Plan

Planning for the change will involve exploration of best mentoring practices by the change team. It is important during this planning stage for the change team to develop the strategy and translate this into operational terms (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015).

Best research practices will support the creation of an RDSB mentoring handbook, which will guide this process. Key practices of highly successful mentoring initiatives will be used to create an RDSB approach. The Vermont Mentoring Initiative (VPA, 2022) uses the following key strategies and best practices which will help guide the RDSB:

- Keeping an on-going list of principals who have been trained as mentors to ensure strong matches with mentees,
- Superintendent is very involved in the entire process to ensure system goals are clarified and connected to the mentoring program

In the Ontario Mentoring Initiative (LDSB, 2010), the following key strategies and best practices will be considered for the RDSB mentoring program:

- Providing mentoring to all newly appointed school leaders
- Include the mentoring lead as a member of the senior level team
- Identify at least one mentoring goal that aligns with the board strategic plan and/or board improvement plan for student achievement
- Establish a transparent mentor/mentee matching process
- Establish and communicate the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee
- Develop a process for the initial and on-going assessment of mentee learning needs
- Provide a joint mentee/mentor orientation
- Provide high quality mentor training

- Offer on-going professional learning and resources for mentors and mentees
- Develop a learning plan that mentors and mentees use to focus the mentoring interactions
- Provide an exit pass

These examples are two of many that will help guide the RDSB in this change process and creation of a formalized mentoring strategy.

The examples provided link back to the guiding question for the OIP that focused on uncovering best evidence-based research practices to improve this issue. The change team will continue to explore further best practices to consider including mentoring initiatives as well as optimal training development for mentors.

Do

It is important during this stage of inquiry to communicate the strategy and build support with mentees and mentors, align the strategy with the RDSB priorities, and motivate and engage people for successful strategy implementation (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015). We will continue to monitor strengths of our shared vision to improve principal well-being and frequent recognition of mentors, mentees and members of the mentoring change team throughout the process (Austin & Harkins, 2008).

Ethical and distributive leadership practices will be used to guide the implementation of support practices for administrators as highlighted in the original guiding questions for the OIP. Pont et al. (2008) further supports this when they conclude that distributed leadership fits into the “do” stage when leadership tasks in a change process are shared among leaders, followers, and situations. Ethical leadership further strengthens the strategy in this stage by ensuring accountability among all involved in the change process.

Study

Data will be used during implementation to track progress both during the pilot year as well as the full implementation year. Surveys for both mentors and mentees will be completed pre-mentoring, during, and post-mentoring. Monitoring changes during this cycle is important and the team will need to complete a milestone review and closely monitor goals of the mentoring program (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015). An evaluation tool (see Appendix A) will assist with reaching those goals and seeks to answer the following questions:

- Did the mentoring program have the desired effects?
- Did mentees feel supported?
- Did mentors value the experience?
- What should be changed for the full roll out and beyond for sustainability?
- What are the greatest strengths of this program?

In addition to this evaluation survey, evaluation questions can help us determine what we want to know (Markiewitz & Patrick, 2016). Draft evaluation questions, which can support the change team, have been adapted from Markiewitz & Patrick's (2016) and are organized by their suggested categories:

- Appropriateness: To what extent did the mentoring program meet the needs of principals in RDSB?
- Effectiveness: To what degree is the mentoring program of value to key stakeholders in RDSB? What are the strengths of the mentoring program?
- Efficiency: To what degree were available resources (ex – staff, budget, time) used to our best effort?

- Impact: What results, expected and unexpected, direct and indirect, were produced by the mentoring program?
- Sustainability: To what degree was there an indication of on-going benefits attributable to the formal mentoring program?

These draft qualitative questions will be provided to all members of the change team to complete each year at the end of June after the team delves into the data provided by mentees and mentors from Appendix A.

Act

Lessons learned, adjustments and celebrations will be a focus in the Act stage. Data collected will include survey data, interviews, and focus groups with principals to determine feedback on the change process and next steps. The change team will use the data to re-visit the evaluation questions to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Continuous improvement will occur based on accomplishments and our qualitative and quantitative data. This information from mentees and mentors will be an instrumental driving force to understand what requires continued support and alteration (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015). During this stage, we will confirm or adapt the strategy depending on the feedback and data received (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015). All of the tools utilized will be directly connected to the main goal of improving principal support and well-being. Is it imperative to ensure that all stakeholders remain engaged during this change process. This will be accomplished through on-going and effective communication at all levels of the change process.

Unintended consequences to be considered include competing priorities from stakeholders that may pull them away from this change process. This can be responded to by the collaborative, distributive effort of the change team framed by the principal well-being model

(McMullen, 2023) to guide our work. The hierarchical provincial model can be used as a strategy to avoid competing priorities as the province supports consistency across regions. MPAA can be a key stakeholder to promote principal well-being at the provincial level which will assist the RDSB in prioritizing the plan.

The life of a principal is demanding, multifaceted and we need to make certain our mentors and mentees feel supported through this change so that we can honour the need and on-going support for this change. This provides a strong rationale for the importance of on-going communication at all steps of the PDSA cycle. A clear multi year plan ensures effective communication and close monitoring is a focus. This will help to keep everyone on the collaborative change path and will help promote continued success and responding to any potential additional barriers.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 focused on a conceptual framework for change that resulted in a strong change implementation plan that will guide the change team. A detailed and persuasive communication plan was a focus to ensure all stakeholders are involved in the change from the building awareness stage through the entire implementation plan. The PDSA cycle (Demings, 1993) which was used as a tool to monitor and evaluate the change process. The OIP will be finalized with next steps and a narrative epilogue to reflect on this journey.

Next Steps, Future Considerations of the Organizational Improvement Plan

Our ultimate goal with this change process is to enable this centralized support for principals to become an integral part of the RDSB culture (Pietrzak & Paliszkiewicz, 2015). It is clear in the principal well-being model that in order for there to be effective instructional leaders in our schools we need to make the principal role attractive to aspiring teacher leaders. As

explained in previous chapters, the retention of school leaders and increased student success can flourish when we improve job resources and supports for principals. The ultimate goal of the principal well-being model (McMullen, 2023) as well as this organizational change process is an improved work-life balance, high productivity, satisfaction, morale and motivation to lead our schools through immense periods of change in today's educational system.

As a principal leader in the RDSB, I am researching and leading this change process through an ethical and distributive approach to ensure I am able to honour, celebrate and promote the strengths of others. I will move forward utilizing my agency in the RDSB with a focus on moral courage and a willingness to take risks to see this change come to fruition (King and Stevenson, 2017). I have a deep passion for our stakeholders and recognize the need for action in a timely manner to provide stability and sustainability in the educational system in the RDSB.

Next steps with the Organizational Improvement Plan include on-going strategic communication with the senior level team, principals, and other stakeholders at RDSB as well as confirmation of this proposed multiyear mentorship plan. I will continue to delve into ethical and distributive leadership research which will support this journey to prevent the burnout and celebrate an educational system that honours the heart, soul, and future path of each principal. My hope is that this mentorship change process can be mobilized in the RDSB to support and celebrate principals as well as providing an effective process and template for other districts. This will provide steps and solutions to be taken both inside and outside of RDSB to respond to this issue and protect the future of our education system.

Narrative Epilogue

The journey of writing this OIP and exploring this PoP while living the issue as a principal has been an emotional, reflective and inspiring process. The proposed solution is

attainable and timely and the conditions in RDSB are ripe for change. Covid-19 has provided our educational system with an opportunity to reset, examine our current practices, and improve these practices to ensure for optimal student success and well-being. Adopting a formal mentoring strategy takes us in the right direction to protect and promote student achievement and well-being by prioritizing the support of leaders who are instrumental in setting the tone in their schools for effective teaching and learning. We are at a key turning point in education where we are seeing teachers and principals leaving our systems. We owe it to every student to protect this system so that our support in nurturing and educating the citizens of the future is honoured. Principals care deeply about students and staff in their care and we must provide supportive conditions for them so that our schools and system can be optimized for benefit of all stakeholders.

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Appendix A

RDSB Principal Mentoring Program Evaluation

Name: _____ Role & School: _____

Mentor/Mentee (please circle one)

Please indicate your answer for each evaluation question

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This mentoring program met/is meeting my needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My relationship with my mentor/mentee is valuable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been provided with appropriate resources as a mentor/mentee in this program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would be interested in being a mentor for an administrator next school year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain your answers below and comment on the overall effectiveness of the program and your experience. (please use the back of this page if more space is needed)

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to our mentoring initiative for principals and vice principals!