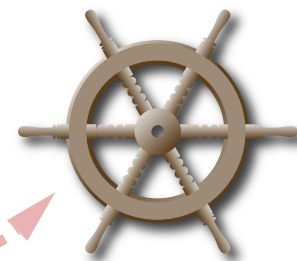


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## Aspiring Leaders in Nova Scotia's Schools

by Debbie McIsaac, NSTU Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

The role of the principal, as school instructional leader, is crucial to the development and success of school improvement and student learning. Being immersed in an ever changing landscape of teaching, learning, and leading, administrators need to be empowered to lead our schools. In the face of change and challenges, they must be prepared to create a community of collaboration and collegiality aimed at meeting the needs of students, educators and society.

Research has established that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an influence on learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Principals can, and do, make a significant impact on what happens in the classroom. As instructional leaders in their school, principals are much more than managers, data collectors and disciplinarians. The complexity of the role requires the skills and abilities to deal with the ever increasing workload, socio-economic and cultural demands, use of technology and social media, as well as the demand for accountability.

To address the need to build strong leadership and capacity in instructional leaders in schools across our province, a province-wide team was established to develop a new Aspiring Leaders Program. The team is representative of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, regional school boards, universities, administrators, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium (NSELC), and the Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy (NSILA). Following the success of the NSELC modules and the Instructional Leadership Academy, this program will be designed to offer aspiring leaders a critical professional learning experience while providing the opportunity to build networks of support, as well as affording a residency component in a school other than their own.

The program extends over 13 months beginning in August 2015. The design team has outlined the organizational structure of the Aspiring Leaders Program with an emphasis on the development of seven seminars, beginning Friday afternoon and continuing into Saturday and two summer institutes in August 2015 and August 2016. An eight



*Above are members of the Aspiring Leadership Program design team. From left to right: David MacKinnon, Dean of Research & Grad Studies, Professor in School of Education, Acadia University; Bill Kaulbach, principal Cobequid Education Centre; Jared Purdy, principal, Yarmouth Central School; Margo Tait, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board superintendent; Lawrence Ryan, education consultant; Sandi Carmichael, Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy (NSILA); NSTU executive staff officer Debbie McIsaac; Terry Wadden, NSELC Executive Director and Tony Stewart, NSILA. Missing from photo: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development representative Sharon MacCuspik.*

day residency component will be integrated throughout the program. The participants will complete the program as a cohort, in locations to be determined, and will be granted a certificate following an exit assessment and successful completion of all program components.

The seminars are designed to be highly interactive sessions using case studies, role plays, group problem solving and discussion of real life experiences of school administrators. They identify eight domains determined as critical to the success of a school administrator to lead in times of change and challenges. Each domain outlines the competencies of understanding and ability the aspiring leader should have upon completion of the program. The content of the seminars will focus on diversity and social justice; school culture and building relationships; leading change; instructional leadership; collaborative learning teams; communication; school management; and student services. All eight domains will demonstrate a direct link to one or more of the four pillars in the Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education 2015.

The eight day residency, which is a site-based residency under the guidance of a mentor principal, will incorporate the learning and skills

reflective of each of the seminars. School placements will be determined by Board personnel. Learning activities during the residency will include, but not be limited to, classroom observations and walkthroughs, participation in PLC meetings, staff meetings, parent meetings, SAC meetings, program planning team and committee meetings, presentations to staff, sharing of best practices and debriefing with the principal. Participants will be expected to maintain a learning log of their experience.

Candidates for the program will be required to submit an application to their School Board and selection will be done by Board personnel. Boards will be encouraged to identify their needs as they relate to the Aspiring Leaders Program. Applications will be received and short-listed based on identified criteria. All applicants will be considered based on quality of the application, references and in response to the Board's priorities and needs. Successful applicants will go through an interview process that will include questions, a presentation, or performance-based task. Candidates who are not successful will be offered the opportunity to have a debriefing meeting following the selection process. Templates and options for Boards

to use during the recruitment and selection process, as well as professional development for mentor principals, will be provided.

The exit assessment for the Aspiring Leaders Program will allow the participant the opportunity to show what they know and have learned upon completion of the seminars, residency and summer institutes in relation to the eight domains. The assessment will include components such as a self-survey, mentor survey, reflective writing and an exit interview by an assessment committee at the Board level.

The importance of engaging and supporting aspiring leaders in our schools cannot be overstated. We often hear from our school leaders, in current leadership roles, the need to identify and address the key elements necessary to promote strong leadership and instructional practices. Programs such as the Aspiring Leadership Program aim to meet the particular needs of aspiring leaders and provide a compelling professional learning experience for participants.

Applications are now being accepted for the first cohort. For more information on the program and directions to access the online application for the program, visit the NSELC website ([www.nselc.ca](http://www.nselc.ca)).

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