



## Principal training programs need to address political skills

### What is this research about?

A principal serves as a leader and director in creating school success. His/her tasks include building relationships and networks with teachers, families, and communities as well as working with education policy. In doing so, s/he uses various strategies to achieve specific goals. Thus, a principal's role is a political one that demands that principals can use political skills to address pressing school and community issues. In Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) developed the Principal Qualification Program (PQP) guidelines to inform principal preparation programs and advise prospective principals of their responsibilities and expectations of the position. But do the PQP guidelines address the political facets of being a principal in Ontario?

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers began with a literature review in the area of school micropolitics: the study of formal and informal power that individuals and groups use to achieve goals in a school setting. They noted five political skills that principals need to possess to meet their responsibilities. These skills are the ability to: persuade others; bargain and negotiate; build networks and develop

### What you need to know:

Principals are not neutral leaders. They use political skills in their work everyday in order to manage and advocate on their schools' distinct needs. Principal training programs need to address political skills in their curriculum.

coalitions; understand political terrain; and appropriate policy.

Following this, the PQP guidelines were analyzed for references to the skills identified in the literature review. References in the PQP guidelines that recognize aspects of education politics including policy work, political goals, and political environments were also identified.

### What did the researchers find?

The PQP guidelines do not explicitly state that prospective principals must develop or possess political skills. However, there are implicit references in the guidelines that suggest an awareness of the political nature of principals' work.

One political goal that was observed in the PQP guidelines involves a commitment to equity and inclusive education. Other political goals include managing and implementing

change and engaging with labour relations in the school and community.

However, there were no explicit expectations that prospective principals learn political skills in the PQP guidelines. General statements that can be used to support learning about political skills are present, however.

The PQP guidelines also focus on the principal's role to implement policy. This is in contrast to the political skill of appropriating policy, where a principal considers how to use policy to meet his or her school's distinct needs. The guidelines also explicitly discuss principals as policy makers in curriculum and school planning. However, this still did not address instances where principals may appropriate policy to handle the complex issues at their schools.

The researchers argued that while PQP guidelines do not explicitly identify the political skills principals need, PQP instructors can find support in the guidelines for addressing these skills in their classes. If they do not, principals may learn the importance of these political skills through mistakes or in difficult situations. Prospective principals should also be introduced to competing ideas on policy in PQP courses so they can make informed decisions as they lead and advocate for their schools.

### How can you use this research?

This research may be useful for PQP instructors who are looking for ways to address the political nature of principals' work. It may also be useful to educators who are seeking to gain or expand administrative experience or for those who generally want to learn more about the political nature of principals' work. It sheds insight on the large scale implications of the work done by

principals and their school and community based partners.

### About the Researchers

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### Keywords

*Education, principals, principal qualification programs, schools, leadership, policy, Ontario.*

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