

The Standards of Professionalism

Laura Bickerton inaugurates a series of columns on how the work of the Ministry's Teacher Regulation Branch intersects with the work of principals and vice-principals.

The current system for teacher regulation in British Columbia, administered by the Ministry of Education's Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB), came into force on January 9, 2012. The regulatory structure consists of four separate and distinct entities, each of which plays its own unique role under the *Teachers Act*. The *Act* created the Commissioner for Teacher Regulation, the Disciplinary and Professional Conduct Board, the Director of Certification, and the British Columbia Teachers' Council (BCTC). In several issues of *Adminfo* this year, we will explore the roles of the various aspects of regulation of educators and how the work of the regulator intersects with the work of principals and vice-principals.

Regulation of Professions

The regulation of professions is the responsibility of provincial governments in Canada but can be delegated to the profession itself through legisla-

tion. Governments are elected to carry out the wishes of citizens and must act in the public interest. Any regulatory body that the government creates must, therefore, also act in the public interest. Regulation exists to protect the public from the incompetent practice or misconduct of professionals. The public expects that when they put themselves in the care of professionals, those professionals will be knowledgeable and up-to-date with best practice, ethical in their interactions with their clients and skilled in delivering the particular service for which they are licensed. As a result of their specialized knowledge and skill sets, professionals are granted wide latitude in their ability to make decisions that affect the health, prosperity and quality of life of citizens.

BC Teachers' Council: Setting the Standards for Educators

One of the most important roles that regulators play is the development of

standards that govern a profession. For educators, standards are established by the BC Teachers' Council (BCTC), which is made up of 16 appointed and elected educators and education partners who are empowered by the *Teachers Act* to:

- set standards for certification, conduct and competence,
- establish certificate types and,
- set standards for and approve teacher education programs in BC.

Standards, while derived from the practice of the profession, are established to benefit the public and, ultimately, it is the public, through government, who will determine whether or not the standards are adequate. A professional who breaches standards has betrayed the public trust, not only in terms of the actions of the individual but also the profession as a whole. For example, when a doctor practices his/her craft in an incompetent manner, the public becomes wary of other doctors. Are they also incompetent? Should they be trusted? It is when the regulatory body for doctors, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia, acts swiftly and appropriately in defense of patients to discipline the doctor that the public feels safe in the care of other doctors. When a profession does not act with the public interest foremost, it will suffer loss of respect and confidence.

The Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in British Columbia (Stand-

ards), apply to all certified educators in British Columbia, including teachers and administrators in public, independent and First Nations schools. The *Standards* include eight high level statements of expectations for teachers related to their knowledge, skill and conduct. It is on the basis of these *Standards* that the Director of Certification at the TRB issues certificates to teach in British Columbia and that the Commissioner or a hearing panel holds certificate holders accountable for incompetence or misconduct. These *Standards* are the minimal standards that a parent or employer can expect from an educator in BC.

Administrators and the *Standards*


How should the *Standards* be used outside of the regulatory realm? One of the major aspects of *Standards* is related to professional identity. The concept of professional is predicated on two frames. The first is the knowledge, skill and conduct that sets them apart from those who are not in the profession and the second is licensure. Only members of a profession are licensed to practice in a particular field or occupation and they are licensed based on the

knowledge and skill they have acquired and the code of conduct they uphold. The way in which professionals think of themselves and their work — the way they build a professional identity — should be framed by the *Standards*.

Do we as educators use the *Standards* in this way? Do we use them to reflect on our practice or to set goals for our ongoing professional development? Do we use them to consider the decisions we make when building and implementing relationships with students, parents and colleagues? Do we point to them with pride when we interact with these groups? Do you, as a principal or vice-principal, display your teaching certificate proudly on your wall? Are the *Standards* front and centre in your office and in your school?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then it might be argued that you are missing an opportunity to build professional identity and forge a community of educators within your schools that encompasses all those who hold

a teaching certificate. This is a worthy goal and one that can be achieved through building understanding and capacity with respect to the *Standards*. They are one touchstone that connects us all, whether we work as classroom teachers, vice-principals or principals and whether we work in the public, independent or First Nations systems.

Principals and vice-principals continue to build this community through their knowledge of the *Standards* and by making them part of their daily work. You can raise the profile of the *Standards* beyond what is typically thought of — tools related to discipline. Display your teaching certificate and the *Standards* in prominent places and refer to the *Standards* in your work with colleagues. Through your daily professional use of the *Standards*, you can build a community of educators that is inclusive of all educators and one that is highly respected by the citizens of British Columbia. 

Laura Bickerton is the Director, Professional Education and Communications, of the Teacher Regulation Branch, Ministry of Education. She can be reached at Laura.Bickerton@gov.bc.ca For information on the *Standards* and all aspects of the work of the Teacher Regulation Branch visit www.bcteacherregulation.ca

BCPVPA renews the *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in BC*

The *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in BC (revised 2013)* is now available for download and use from the BCPVPA website. Four core domains — “Moral Stewardship,” “Instructional Leadership,” “Relational Leadership,” and “Organizational Leadership” — have been expanded with nine individual standards: values, vision and mission; ethical decision-making; supervision for learning; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; intrapersonal relationships; interpersonal relationships; learning culture; management and administration; and community building. This document is not intended to be prescriptive in nature, but rather to be used to support the individual principal or vice-principal in reflecting on his or her learning needs. The purpose of the document is to foster continuous professional learning in working towards effective leadership; therefore, it is not intended as an instrument for evaluation or the judgment of the individual performance of principals and vice-principals by districts.