



FROM

David DeRosa is in the second year of his two-year term as President of the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association. We asked him about his first year at the helm, and what inspires him to work for members every day.

"It's hard to believe that a year can go by that fast." David DeRosa is reflective about his first year as President. He's helped to lead the Association through some complex developments including an evolving discussion with members and the education sector about the importance of equity in contract negotiations, and the burgeoning conversation about health and wellness for school leaders and school communities.

A highlight for David has been development of a better awareness of the unique cultural and geographical context of members' work, within their school communities, in their different districts, in their Chapters and with BCPVPA as a provincial organization. "It's been a real pleasure, traveling and literally breathing the air with our members, right in their communities. They do the same work that I do, but in their local context. What I've been reminded of is that there is a very common core to what we do, because we all work with humans. We often talk about the three most important things in education – relationships, relationships, relationships – I would

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say we can summarize that as the connection of 'being human'. We sometimes forget, we refer to this overarching infrastructure called 'education' and use terms like 'system' or 'organization' to describe it. We're so connected doing very similar work as part of the system, and it's been a really good reminder for me that as individuals we may be isolated geographically, but we don't have to be isolated professionally in a way that I maybe I once thought."

David is feeling good about the accomplishments of the past year, but acknowledges a nervousness about the goals that he hasn't yet fulfilled. One area of continued focus is the work that our members do in their roles, and in particular work intensification. "It's the challenge of the role, and it's the pathway to develop leadership capacity: the two are directly connected. At BCPVPA, at an organizational level, we talk about how we have observed across the province the growing complexity of the role of our members, and how we have a lens on that complexity through our regular communication with all sixty of our local Chapters. For individual school leaders, it may feel like things are fine and moving along as they always have, but they may not be aware that just a few miles down the road a colleague is experiencing some significant challenges. The work that is both in progress and ahead is making sure we can be proactive in identifying and supporting those challenges, being proactive in supporting folks across the province."

The recognition of what leaders need to do to remain well and to thrive has been a big part of David's journey over his first year as President. "Where I was prior to the past year was in a place of developing my own awareness and understanding of

personal well-being. I've been so fortunate because I had the opportunity to attend the workshop with Peter Senge and Mette Miriam Boell: understanding compassionate systems changed much of how I do things. I've really moved into more of a systems



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thinking approach, and considered how we establish boundaries for ourselves as individuals, and for the expectations we place on our teams," says David.

"It takes some purposeful judgment in the learning process to transition from a place of sympathy – which is an observational piece, recognizing that others may be experiencing challenges themselves – to a place of empathy which is an awareness and appreciation for what the other person may have been engaged in, while leaving them to their behaviours. It's very easy to get stuck in this place, and not be able to get out of it. So the third step is transitioning to a place of compassion where we don't let go of the understanding and awareness of the challenge, but we do move to a place where we're in a position to support."

David recognizes that the challenges in the education sector are not limited to the adults. "I think that when you look at a really, really big picture, there's a new social struggle for our students, for their parents, and for the community where there's historically been different agency and support. There's a growing

recognition of the pressures on young people, we see it in the media, it's difficult. I heard some people talk about the climate strike and say 'that's kids skipping school'. Kids *enjoy* school, that's not what this is about. We need to look at purposeful skill development, and have conversations around tools that are not dissociated from the complex needs of the people that we serve, but to be compassionate about those complex needs. It's an interesting space to be exploring."

David anticipated some surprises as part of his journey as BCPVPA President, but one he didn't anticipate was his relationship with partners in the education sector. "I've had this humble perspective from when I came into this role: I'm Dave from Trail. That's still the way that I approach it, but I got past it in a sense when I recognized that people really do want to hear a perspective that they they don't have from their own day-to-day experience. I feel that I am seen as someone with expertise to bring to the table at the committee meetings where I'm representing Principals and Vice-Principals."

David smiles. "So, there are two things that I take with me into those relationships: having my own personal experience as an educator, and then recognizing that that experience has so much in common with my colleagues across the province. That's a good foundation piece, and now I'm able to be in some of our more rural and remote Chapters in school districts, and I feel confident that I can speak on behalf of that experience. Not for those members personally, of course, or for their specific roles, but I feel confident to speak on their behalf with a metro voice and a rural voice and everything in between."

David looks back on the path that led him to seek the President's office. In 2012, with his oldest daughter's graduation from high school, David recognized that

he could take the opportunity to layer on a new professional experience. He had represented the Chapter at different events and contract meetings, and was inspired by his connections with other members. “Anytime I got in a room, whether it was with five other Principals or Vice-Principals or a hundred-and-fifty, it was just a rewarding professional growth experience. I felt good about being able to share what I’d experienced, even though I was from a relatively remote area. I was enriched by sharing what teachers in my school were doing, and what my colleagues in their schools were doing, at that provincial table.”

Many times, those conversations turned to contracts, professional learning, well-being and work intensification, and David felt a strong connection. As a Director of the Board, he had great respect for Shelley Green who served as President from 2012-2014. “I was so inspired by Shelley as a President,

and to have been a Director working with Shelly I knew that at some point that would be a role and a responsibility that I would aspire to. I am in awe of what she did to move the organization forward, and her leadership was inspiring. I learned more about the provincial perspective and what was critical for strategic planning. And I really started thinking about ways to bring value for our members, and to have opportunities to add value to what others are doing – that would be kids, teachers, parents and communities.”

And, particularly, kids. “I never stopped being a teacher, literally and figuratively. It was hard to come to the realization that there’s literally not enough time in the day to be an effective teacher, to be effective for the kids, if you’re constantly being pulled aside and called out of the classroom. So it got harder to do that as a Principal in a high school; then it became almost impossible, but the teacher in me never stopped”.

In pursuit of teaching, and supporting others to lead, David has been instrumental in the introduction of BetterEducate, an online platform that is a connection hub for educators. “The BetterEducate piece ties in with a core value that’s always been there for me, but has evolved into more of a focus. You have a Principal who has a fabulous skill set and experience around an early intervention reading program and there’s their neighbour at a school down the street who doesn’t have that same experience. And for them to share and collaborate around a professional growth opportunity – the networked piece of that relationship – it allows for some vulnerability, and opens space for relationship-building.”

“BetterEducate is the answer to a ton of different challenges across complex organizations, it can support and align what’s happening in classrooms,



and can shine a light on the amazing things that are happening in the sector, but also where we need support. That light, that transparency, is part of the Vice-Principal's or Principal's professional growth and there are actions that can be taken because it's aligned with our Leadership Standards. Every profession needs a framework for professional engagement, a guide to both the practical and aspirational aspects of the role. The Standards are now woven into the tool in BetterEducate, and we're excited about adding School Plans as a critical piece: it's the next level of transparency."

David's ultimate focus will continue to be ensuring quality leadership in schools, and creating space for leadership all around the school community. "For every successful Principal, they are there working with amazing teachers and I'm pretty sure there's a symbiosis there: without one, you can have an okay school, but when you have them both, you have an amazing school. I always talk about how we are the second biggest impact on student success, giving teachers their due."

And his connection with members will always be his first and greatest priority. "I appreciate when members reach out and connect with me on something that I've written, or a project that the BCPVPA is doing. Even though they can't directly engage in the work of this organization, it's so important that they are doing the work they do. And if ever there's a day or a week where they can connect with us as an organization, then we feel that we're making a difference: to Principals and Vice-Principals, to students and indirectly to teachers. There are so many of our members who are giving so much, and those are the ones I worry about, because it's a tough and challenging job." Dave from Trail will serve as BCPVPA President until June 30, 2020. We can't wait to see what he'll accomplish during year two.

You've been elected President. You're leaving your home community for Vancouver.

What was that like?

"It was less about me, and more about my partner Christine. I was concerned: I'd prepared myself, and wrapped my own head around it, so I guess I was worried but also confident. Christine is just an amazing educator, so a big part of me was screaming 'wait until they see her!' It's a thing about patting ourselves on the back, and we're two of the last people in the world to do that. So this was the opportunity for recognition of an amazing 25 years of impactful teaching. We talked a lot about this in advance. And now it's been a year, and she is so appreciated, being in a different school with different people who have arrived there from very different pathways. They all have so much to share as far as professional growth and development are concerned."

"It's been a really good year: but she hates driving in the city."

"The other part that's surprised me is how I'm able to replicate some of the things I loved about living in the Kootenays. So I go to Pacific Spirit Park on a Saturday and walk around, we can hike and we can ski. I thought it was going to be a lot of airports and a lot of meetings. And it has been a lot of airports and a lot of meetings, but it has been really cool. I was worried about my three kids, now they're far away, but we schedule our time together. We are probably seeing them more than we did before."