Rich in Tradition, Progressive in Practice, Building Our Future Together

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"Teaching is a passionate vocation...Passionate teachers need interaction with, and support from others to avoid becoming exhausted. All teachers need to inspire each other through collaborative work, to take advantage of the power of emotional resources, and to provide the interpersonal safety nets when the going gets rough."

Michael Fullen

In the Halton District School Board we appreciate the power of relationships, not only at an interpersonal level, but also among all aspects of the teacher/learner dynamic. Our Partners in the Classroom program is designed to optimize the use of these relationships to ease the transition to the teaching profession for our newest members of the Halton family while at the same time modelling the behaviours that we want to see across our system.

"Pervasive caring is a criterion for school effectiveness"

Much is written these days about the importance of alignment for effectiveness in all organizations. Schools that have "turned around" and have witnessed significant gains in the achievement levels of all of their kids, have done so through aligning all school behaviours to this goal; however, there remains no more important relationship than the teacher to the child.

In Halton, we believe that just as every student is important, so is every teacher - thus our Partners Program. This year long orientation to the teaching profession and to the Halton District School Board sets the stage for a career of professional growth and development through a combination of professional learning activities and a one-one mentorship relationship. The value of mentorship is grounded in research but further evidence of its impact on our new teachers to Halton will be presented first hand later in this article.

We are committed to...

promoting and providing ongoing professional growth for all staff

During the past couple of years, the Halton District School Board has gone through a process of creating a Strategic Plan including a new Mission Statement and Guiding Principles. As evidence of our commitment to our teachers, every teacher in the Board had the opportunity to provide input to this plan. Although this may not be unique you may be thinking, the fact that over 4,000 Halton staff in groups of approximately 25, were in the same room at the same time giving their input to 144 trained facilitators is a testament to how they are valued. We live our Mission and Guiding Principles.

MISSION
The Halton District School Board is committed to providing the highest quality education which prepares our students for success as responsible, participating citizens of the global community.

As you are about to read, the Partners Program is simply an introduction for new teachers to Halton to a life of professional learning. Its effectiveness will become clear as you read the comments of its creator and two of its recent participants.

"It is a fact that in the right formation, the lifting power of many wings can achieve twice the distance of any bird flying alone."

(Anonymous)

In every profession, the novice must learn to apply their learnings for the first time. Each must transfer what they were taught as students to what they must do as practitioners in their chosen profession. The teaching profession is, however, unique. The design of school buildings and the organization of the day can physically isolate its newest members from contact with their colleagues for much of the time. Too often, during the first years of "on the job training", teachers have to master their craft through trial and error and in an isolated environment.

The Halton District School Board hired approximately 150 elementary and 75 secondary teachers this year. In the next few years, many other new teachers will join Halton's staff. This significant rate of change challenges us to integrate new staff and to provide a supportive teaching and learning environment.

We believe that this first year of a teacher's career is crucial and that our experienced staff can provide invaluable guidance and support for the newest members of the profession. For this reason, Partners in the Classroom combines
a solid professional development plan with mentor support. Partner 
pairs are formed to combine a Faculty graduate with an experienced 
mentor partner in the school. Since the focus for growth and change is 
the school, the concept of a school based mentor partner ensures on-
going, practical support.

The Partners in the Classroom program is designed to engage 
new staff in a process of interactive professionalism. Specific ex-
pectations of the program are to:

- provide orientation for new teachers and assist their integra-
tion into the professional and social life of their school com-
unities;

- provide support to promote teachers' professional and per-
sonal self esteem;

- enhance the acquisition and refinement of knowledge, skills 
and attitudes related to effective classroom instruction;

- encourage habits of reflection and self evaluation of teaching 
practices; and

- foster a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

The content of the program balances large group input sessions 
and smaller divisional (e.g., Primary, Junior, Intermediate) and 
specialist (e.g., Core French, Secondary Math & Science) sessions 
with school based coaching.

The large group and smaller di-

visional and specialist sessions 
that are offered between August 
and May focus on five key aspects 
of the teaching role:

- Setting the Climate for Learning: 
Strategies (e.g., Tribes) which cre-
ate a positive learning environ-
ment in the classroom;

- Instruction for Success: A series 
of workshops which focus on the 
components of effective classroom 
planning as well as teaching and learning strategies;

- Assessing the Learning: Sessions 
which highlight the components of 
effective assessment and evalua-
tion;

- Communicating the Learning: 
Sessions which deal with the 
development of positive relationships 
and the skills of effective 
communication with parents, admin-
istrators, colleagues and stu-
dents;

- Reflection and Renewal: Feedback 
which includes evaluation 
of the program and future needs.

"Two Day August Program 
Helps Teachers Cope with 
First Day Stress"

At the end of August this year, 
new teachers and their mentors 
spent two days together prepar-
ing for the upcoming school year. 
The energy in the room was in-
credible! The first day focused on 
setting the climate for learning and 
planning for the first day and 
weeks of school as well as learn-
ing about the "Nitty Gritty" infor-
mation which is specific to each 
school (e.g., photocopying proce-
dures, the names of key people in 
the school such as secretarial 
care-taking staff, the teacher-librarian 
and the Special Education Resource 
Teacher). Teachers worked in their 
family of school groupings and 
also in smaller divisional and spe-
cialist groups. These smaller 
groups are lead by "Super Men-
tors" who are part of the Partners 
in the Classroom planning team. 
These mentors are Consultants and 
Coordinators in the curricu-

lum department or master class-
room teachers. They provide 
support and leadership as well as 
practical ideas to a specific group 
(e.g., JK/SK, Core French, Music). 
Store fronts were also set up on 
this first day so that new staff had 
an opportunity to meet and make 
connections with the Curriculum 
Department Consultants and Co-
ordinators.

The second day in August fo-
cussed on Classroom Management. Barrie Bennett spent the 
day with the new teachers looking 
at the complex art of teaching and 
classroom management. Teachers 
left the session with very concrete 
and practical suggestions and 
ideas. A follow-up after-school 
session was held at the beginning of 
October. At this time, teachers 
had an opportunity to continue 
their learning with Barrie and 
each other and to talk about spe-
cific classroom management 
isues that had arisen during the 
first month of school.

Recognizing that everyone is 
tired at the end of a teaching day, 
the Partners in the Classroom pro-
gram combines after-school with 
half-day sessions for which sup-
ply coverage is provided by the 
Board. In September and October, 
half-day inservice sessions with a 
focus on Assessment and Evalua-
tion were held for division and 
subject speciality groups. Fol-
low-up half-day sessions for these 
groups will also be held in Janu-
ary.

"Between the large and 
smaller group sessions, the 
new teachers interact for-
mally and informally with 
their mentors."

Between the large and smaller 
group sessions, the new teachers 
interact formally and informally 
with their mentors. Discussion 
may focus on teaching and learn-
ing strategies, resources, school 
routines, record keeping, class-
room management and planning. 
It takes a special kind of person to 
be a good mentor. The key charac-
teristic is a sincere desire to be in-

volved with and support the new 
teacher. A good mentor is one 
who is a skillful teacher, able to 
share effective teaching and learn-
ing strategies, knowledgeable
about the curriculum, a good listener, an open communicator and sensitive to the needs of the new teacher. We are fortunate to have so many experienced teachers in Halton who are willing to provide support and leadership for new staff.

A strong mentor-partner relationship significantly benefits the beginning teacher, not only during the first year but also in years to come. Mentor partners experience a significant leadership opportunity as they contribute to the development of new professionals. Mentors also benefit from their interaction with the new teachers. The first year teacher often brings an enthusiasm that is infectious, as well as a different way of approaching teaching. The partnerships are two-way learning situations. The students in Halton benefit from a learning environment in which colleagues support each other and grow together professionally. The Halton District School Board retains and nurtures promising new staff while enhancing the professional growth of experienced teachers. Over the years, the feedback from all who are involved with the program has been extremely positive.

When the teacher recruitment process begins each year, the Partners in the Classroom program is one of the reasons why new teachers look to Halton as the place where they would like to begin their career. Next August a new group of teachers will be welcomed into the Board and will come together once again with their mentors and Halton staff to begin the process of teaching and learning together.

On a personal note...

*What the Partnership Program has meant to us*

We are now second-year teachers, proud to have successfully completed our first year of teaching, and equally proud to be in the midst of our second. We continue to inspire and to be inspired by those around us. As second-year teachers we can now reflect how the Halton District School Board’s Partners Program fostered our professional growth. In fact, we continue to reap its benefits.

*"They believed in our ideas and abilities, thus giving us the added confidence to succeed in our first year of teaching."*

Similar to beginning any new career we were elated, full of promise and ideas. We were passionate about our new paths, and looked forward to growing with our profession. Just the same, we couldn’t help but feel some apprehension: we were to be moulding the future. Luckily, we were not alone. Rather, we were matched with mentors through Halton’s Partners Program. They provided curriculum and programming advice, and acted as great emotional resources when times seemed tough. They believed in our ideas and abilities, thus giving us the added confidence to succeed in our first year of teaching.

This idea of partnership, however, extends well beyond our immediate mentors. We have found that in both of our schools, the idea of partnership filters through many levels. Our fellow colleagues, administrators, secretarial and custodial staff all demonstrate a willingness to be actively involved in our careers. They can be counted on for most anything. Their commitment to the teaching profession and to each other is evident.

Along with support and guidance, the Partnership Program offers various leadership opportu-

nities. Our mentors, who gladly offered feedback and advice, are prime examples of this. Perhaps with any other partnership program, the role of leader would begin and end with the role of mentor. We quickly discovered, however, that this was not the case with Halton District’s Partners Program. We served as both providers and recipients. For example, just this past year we were invited to represent the School Board in recruiting new teacher candidates. This allowed us the opportunity to speak of our own personal experiences, and to share with up-coming teachers the premise of this particular program. We were able to reciprocate the guidance and leadership received only earlier that year.

The Halton District School Board’s Partners Program has been a welcoming introduction to our teaching careers. It has fostered professional growth, has provided support and guidance, and has enhanced the skills needed to be a successful educator. Undoubtedly, it is a program with benefits for all: students, new teacher partners and mentor partners alike.