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York Region Catholic School Board principals Mary Devereaux (left) and Mary Puopolo are among 28 principals from across the nation named recipients of the inaugural Canada's Outstanding Principals Awards.

Dynamic duo among province's best principals

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

Of Canada's legion of exceptional educators, Mary Devereaux and Mary Puopolo are among the best.

The two veteran York Catholic District School Board principals have been named recipients of the inaugural Canada's Outstanding Principals award, a nationwide program recognizing exemplary contributions to education.

Organized by The Learning Partnership in collaboration with the Canadian Association of Principals, Ms Devereaux and Ms Puopolo will be honoured Feb. 26 at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, an affiliate sponsor.

The two women are among 28 principals selected by a panel of private sector, community and education leaders and represent the only school board in Canada with more than one award winner.

"It's exciting and quite an honour to be included in the awards

and to be part of the only board with two recipients," said Ms Devereaux, former principal of St. Theresa of Lisieux Catholic High School in Richmond Hill. "It says a lot about the leadership development and vision of the Catholic board."

A 25-year member of the Catholic board, Ms Devereaux was named the board's superintendent of schools Feb. 1, weeks after she learned she was to be honoured.

The Stouffville resident was selected for her work in developing the framework for the Catholic Professional Learning Communities program, embracing herself in the history of St. Theresa and bringing the community into the school's decision-making process. The program focuses on learning team dialogue to continually improve student achievement.

In tandem with the learning model, Ms Devereaux was recognized for her active leadership role in the development of a school-wide literacy plan that resulted in her Grade 9 to 12 students attain-

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ing top Ontario Secondary School literacy test scores.

As the founding principal at St. Theresa, she will miss her 1,300 students and 100 staff, but is enthusiastic about the challenges of her superintendent's role.

"It's certainly a transition," she said. "It's more global, being responsible for 17 elementary schools. Now I'll be supervising leadership development, curriculum implementation and school learning communities. I'm looking forward to visiting all the schools."

Ms Puopolo, founding principal

at St. Augustine Catholic High School in Markham and now assistant to the superintendent of curriculum, is being honoured for her work and vision in creating a school recognized nationally for its use of new technology in classrooms.

"Technology is a passion of mine," she said. "I wanted a school focused on academic excellence and the integration of technology in the curriculum. I also wanted to help create a school in which all the students would have an awareness of their role in the community."

Optimizing available technology and sponsor support, Ms Puopolo co-ordinated the Clarica Scholars Program where students attended extensive training at the University of Waterloo and Acadia University. She was also instrumental in the SchoolNet Grassroots initiative for innovative web-sites in math and science.

By successfully winning grants to support technology-based education, Ms Puopolo maximized

students' exposure to new, cutting edge computer and Internet learning opportunities. Through Ms Puopolo's efforts, St. Augustine, attended by 1,100 students and staffed by 85, was acknowledged as one of Canada's top 40 schools by MacLean's magazine in 2004.

"I'm honoured and privileged to be a recipient and that we are receiving the awards on behalf of the board," she said.

"I feel a sense of sadness about leaving because the school has accomplished so much. At the same time, in my new role, I'll be able to do more for all the students we serve in the system, in particular, our at-risk learners."

The Learning Partnership is a non-profit organization bringing together business, education, government, labour, policy makers and the community to develop partnerships designed to strengthen public education in Canada.

Nominations were received from each province and territory with winners selected after a comprehensive review.



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