Principals’ Work and Well-Being in Ontario

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Booklet #2
Well-Being of School Principals

PART OF A SERIES OF 4 BOOKLETS
Overview

This booklet summarizes the findings of a research survey and describes principals’ well-being along six dimensions:

- physical
- cognitive
- psychological
- emotional
- social
- spiritual

and provides evidence-informed recommendations to better support principals’ overall health and well-being.

The Respondents

2419 invited
35.6% response rate

- 541 elementary principals
- 123 secondary principals
- 23 middle school principals
- 12 K-12 principals
- 5 system principals
### Overall Well-Being

**Feelings of Overall Well-Being at Work**

- **5.2%** very poor
- **25.1%** poor
- **25.3%** neutral
- **39.6%** good
- **4.8%** excellent

If principals felt drained by their work, this is the extent to which the following aspects of their well-being were CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overall Physical Well-Being** 40.8%

**Overall Emotional Well-Being** 32.7%

**Overall Psychological Well-Being** 20.7%

**Overall Cognitive Well-Being** 15.8%

**Overall Social Well-Being** 11.3%

**Overall Spiritual Well-Being** 9.9%

When combining the POOR and VERY POOR feelings of principals toward each aspect of well-being, they felt the worst PHYSICALLY and the best SPIRITUALLY.
### Physical Well-Being

**Feelings of Overall Physical Well-Being at Work**

- **6.9%** very poor
- **33.9%** poor
- **33.2%** neutral
- **23.8%** good
- **2.2%** excellent

**How principals’ work made them feel physically in the week prior:**

- STRESSED
- FATIGUED
- DRAINED
- EXHAUSTED
- WEARY
- BURNT-OUT
- TAXING
- ENERGIZED
- ACTIVE
- DYNAMIC
- ENERGETIC
- STRONG
- WEAK
- LIVELY
- VIBRANT
- TIRELESS

**When feeling drained from work, the extent to which these aspects of principals’ physical well-being were CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:**

- **72.9%**
- **62.0%**
- **58.6%**
- **55.7%**
- **48.2%**
- **38.6%**
- **30.1%**

**The extent to which work demand CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:**

- Doing physical activities: **58.3%**
- Sleeping: **56.0%**
- Eating: **52.1%**
- Having headaches: **35.0%**
- Having uncomfortable feelings in your stomach: **28.6%**
Emotional Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Emotional Well-Being at Work

- 7.1% very poor
- 25.6% poor
- 30.5% neutral
- 33.6% good
- 3.1% excellent

In the week prior, how principals’ work made them feel emotionally:

If principals were feeling emotionally drained by their work, the extent to which each of the following described how they OFTEN or ALWAYS felt:

- 69.3% I feel passionate about my work.
- 67.7% I worry about work-related issues.
- 47.0% I feel happy about my work.
- 44.8% I feel satisfied about my work.
- 30.2% I feel excited when thinking about going to work.
- 16.9% I feel a sense of despair about my work.
Cognitive Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Cognitive Well-Being at Work

- **Very poor (2.1%)**
  - I find my memory recall is challenged

- **Poor (13.7%)**
  - I am able to follow complex procedures at work
  - I am able to connect abstract thought to concrete issues

- **Neutral (30.2%)**
  - I am able to make difficult work-related decisions

- **Good (47.8%)**
  - I am able to make decisions under high pressure
  - I am able to think clearly about work-related issues

- **Excellent (6.2%)**
  - I am able to prioritize competing demands
  - I am able to engage in higher order thinking

The extent to which principals felt each of the following work-related statements OFTEN or ALWAYS applied to them.

**Most**
- I am able to make difficult work-related decisions
- I am able to initiate tasks
- I am able to follow complex procedures at work
- I am able to connect abstract thought to concrete issues
- I am able to make decisions in a fast-paced manner
- I am able to self-monitor
- I am able to multi-task
- I am able to think clearly about work-related issues
- I am able to make decisions under high pressure
- I am able to prioritize competing demands

**Least**
- I find my memory recall is challenged
- I am able to hold attention in a hectic environment
- I am able to engage in higher order thinking
- I am able to make decisions under high pressure
- I am able to think clearly about work-related issues

The **TOP 10** ways principals’ work made them feel cognitively in the prior week:

- **Disorganized (41.0%)**
- **Forgetful (41.0%)**
- **Focused (39.3%)**
- **Unfocused (39.0%)**
- **Attentive (35.5%)**
- **Mindful (33.0%)**
- **Delayed memory retrieval (31.0%)**
- **Absent-minded (31.0%)**
- **Active/quick-witted (25.5%)**
- **Indecisive (23.6%)**
Social Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Social Well-Being at Work

1.8% very poor
9.5% poor
26.8% neutral
51.9% good
10.0% excellent

Principals OFTEN or ALWAYS:

71.6% felt respected at work
52.7% felt supported at work
12.8% felt socially excluded or left out at work
64.8% felt satisfied with work relationships

How the work of principals made them feel socially in the prior week:

DISTANCED
DISSATISFIED
ACCEPTED
VISIBLE
ISOLATED
UNWELCOMED
UNSUPPORTED
REJECTED
WELCOMED
SATISFIED
INVISIBLE
HEARD

Ranking of groups principals felt they OFTEN or ALWAYS have positive relationships with:

Students (96.4%)
Vice-principals (92.1%)
School support staff (88.4%)
Administrative assistants (87.5%)
Teachers (87.2%)
Community leaders (83.0%)
Parents/guardians (81.7%)
Board office staff (71.8%)
Superintendents (70.8%)
Trustees (61.8%)
Union reps (54.3%)

Note: Data was collected during labour dispute.
### Feelings of Overall Psychological Well-Being at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent to which principals felt each of the following work-related statements OFTEN or ALWAYS applied to them:

- **92.0%** My colleagues know they can trust me
- **86.2%** I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a principal since I began the role
- **76.4%** In general, I feel confident and positive about myself as a principal
- **67.7%** I know that I can trust my colleagues
- **67.5%** I enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things
- **65.2%** I judge myself by what I think is important to get the job done, not by what others think is important
- **62.6%** In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I work
- **60.2%** I am not afraid to voice my work opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of stakeholders
- **58.4%** I feel a sense of fulfillment
- **53.0%** I have been able to build a work environment and a work-style for myself that is much to my liking
- **50.6%** I enjoy making work plans for the future
- **42.1%** I feel comfortable challenging the implicit "rules of the game"
- **33.6%** I feel comfortable asking for forgiveness rather than permission
- **27.1%** I feel lonely because I have few close colleagues with whom to share my concerns
- **10.6%** I live, work one day at a time and don't really think about the future
### Spiritual Well-Being

#### Feelings of Overall Spiritual Well-Being at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent to which the following spiritual and religious statements described principals and their work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N/A-NEVER-RARELY</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>OFTEN-ALWAYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often attend religious services to give me strength to deal with work-related issues</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending religious services provides me with a sense of direction and purpose at work</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My religious beliefs sustain me at work</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spiritual practice grounds me at work</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often resort to spiritual practice(s) to give me strength to deal with work-related issues</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spiritual practice provides me with a sense of direction and purpose at work</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recommendations

**For Ministry of Education**
- mandate Well-being Lead positions at the district school board level to support a comprehensive well-being program that includes principals and their schools
- expand the healthy schools initiatives to include the well-being of the school principals
- expand Ontario’s well-being Strategy for Education to include the well-being of the school principals

**For District School Boards**
- consider creating Well-being and Safety Teams to provide support and resources for principals
- designate fund and apply for grants from other agencies to work in partnership with health organizations and researchers to support principals’ well-being

**For Professional Associations**
- mobilize and align existing resources and programs from the districts, health and community organizations, and provincial and municipal governments to improve school system well-being
- explore the possibility of or expand the existing third party partnerships that focuses on wellness in public schools (e.g., STARLING Mind, IWBI, etc.)
- create well-being assessment tools to keep track of the health and well-being of their members to provide better support

**For Principals**
- cultivate individualized strategies to promote health and wellness (e.g., a personalized system dealing with emails/paperwork)
- set aside time to engage physical activities, sports, hobbies, and other individualized well-being practices
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For the full research report, visit:

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