Principals’ Work and Well-Being in Ontario

Dr. Katina Pollock
Dr. Fei Wang

Booklet #3
Principals’ Health and Safety

PART OF A SERIES OF 4 BOOKLETS
Overview

This booklet summarizes the findings of a research survey and explores principals’ health and safety, including:

• contributing factors,
• how the issues manifest, and
• actions that principals can take.

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
For principals, these issues led to draining situations at work **OFTEN** or **ALWAYS**:

**TOP 3**

- Mental health issues among students **79.9%**
- Lack of special education support/resources **74.0%**
- Volume of daily emails **72.4%**

**Lesser factors:**

- **>50%**
  - Mental health issues among teachers
  - Teacher resistance to change
  - Student discipline (excluding bullying)

- **45-50%**
  - Lack of recognition for principals throughout the system
  - Dealing with concerns about teacher performance

- **40-45%**
  - Union issues
  - High levels of support needed by teachers
  - Pressure from superintendent and school board

Note: Data was collected during labour dispute.
School Community Contributors to Draining Situations at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of special education resources &amp; services in the community</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health issues among parents/guardians</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with parents/guardians</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/guardians not involved in their child(ren)’s education</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues in school community</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial or ethnic tensions in school community</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from school’s community</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These issues with the local school community led to draining situations at work for principals OFTEN or ALWAYS.

Safety

While many principals have not personally experienced discrimination in the workplace, others have faced various kinds.

- **NONE**: 46.0%
- **GENDER-BASED**: 27.0%
- **AGE-BASED**: 14.4%
- **RACE-BASED**: 10.6%
- **RELIGION-BASED**: 4.3%
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION-BASED**: 5.9%
- **ABILITY-BASED**: 4.3%
- **OTHER**: 2.9%
Safety

Respondents have faced various safety situations in their careers. The following is the percentage who have experienced harassment, physical assault, and threats in their current role as principals and by which groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARASSED</th>
<th>PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED</th>
<th>THREATENED</th>
<th>GROUPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)/FAMILY MEMBER(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>STUDENT(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>NONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>TEACHER(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>UNION REPRESENTATIVE(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>SUPERINTENDENT(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>OTHER SCHOOL STAFF MEMBER(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>TRUSTEE(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>OTHER PRINCIPAL(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>SUBSTITUTE TEACHER(S)/TTOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>VICE-PRINCIPAL(S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>FACILITY SERVICES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Safety

After being harassed, physically assaulted, and/or threatened, principals will:

- Report to senior management/director/HR (67.7%)
- Talk with family members/friends (57.7%)
- Consult with other colleagues within the district school board (52.2%)
- Follow specific protocol (49.9%)
- Contact their professional association (36.6%)
- Report to the police (21.6%)
- Seek medical/health attention (16.3%)

13% will do nothing

Principals have experienced a variety of unsafe situations in their workplaces:

ISOLATION
PHYSICAL ASSAULT
THREATS OF VIOLENCE
GOSSIP AND SLANDER
BULLYING
PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS
ESCALATED CONFLICTS AND QUARRELS
NONE FALSE ACCUSATION
HARASSMENT OTHER
CYBER-BULLYING
LATERAL VIOLENCE

A fortunate 3% of respondents have never had to deal with these situations.
Recommendations

For Ministry of Education
• continue to strengthen its relationship with the Ministry of Labour to work together to implement the existing Healthy and Safe Ontario Workplaces Strategies as a part of the Ontario public education system

For District School Boards
• build stronger working relationships with other public sector organizations such as the Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA) to support employee wellness
• create or update a quick and handy list for principals on any available policies, procedures, and contact information they might need for easy reference

For Professional Associations
• advocate for public school leaders’ occupational health and safety at the provincial level
• expand and diversify its member support services and Early Intervention Program to direct more attention and resources to principals’ occupational health and safety

For Principals
• know your rights and processes in place that will support you when there are safety issues at work
• build a repertoire of healthy coping strategies that can promote physical, emotional, and psychological well-being—please see the Coping Strategies booklet
Principal Investigators:

Dr. Katina Pollock  
University of Western Ontario  
katina.pollock@uwo.ca  
Twitter: @DrKatinaPollock

Dr. Fei Wang  
University of British Columbia  
fei.wang@ubc.ca  
Twitter: @DrFeiWang

For the full research report, visit:  

To cite this booklet:  
University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.