

# **Principals' Work in Ontario's French-Language Education Systems**

**Final Report**

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## Executive Summary

In this study, we investigated French-language principals' work in Ontario. More specifically, we explored principals' work, the motivations behind their actions, and how they approach their work. In particular, our research team: (a) examined how French Public and French Catholic school principals approach their work, (b) documented how principals spend their time, (c) explored the motives and external factors that influence their choices, (d) described the challenges and possibilities in their work, and (e) investigated how work-related challenges impact principals' health and well-being. Throughout this report, we have aimed to present a more comprehensive understanding of French-language principals' work in contemporary times.

We used a quantitative methods design that included an online survey to collect data from 414 French-language principals. The online survey was modified from two existing English surveys: one focusing on principals (2013) and another focusing on vice-principals (2016). The French survey was also informed by the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL), the 2017 Berger Report for the Institute for Educational Leadership, the ADFO Executive Council, and a focus group consisting of 11 French-language principals. The online survey was comprised of 12 sections and 78 questions that addressed different components of principals' work.

Of those invited to participate, 269 ADFO members responded to the survey over a period of 36 days in November and December 2018. After we removed all inadmissible data and incomplete surveys, a total of 188 surveys were permissible for analysis. The response rate for the survey was 45.41%. The sample included principals working in all 12 French Public and French Catholic school districts, which represent a broad range of school and community contexts.

Our research team used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data collected within each of the 12 categories. In terms of how French-language principals spend their time, our findings revealed that, on average, principals reported working 57.5 hours per week, with 97.9% of the sample consistently working more than the standard 40 hours per week. A factor analysis indicated that principals spend their time mainly in seven areas: (a) well-being, service delivery, and professional learning; (b) social interaction management; (c) budget and instructional leadership; (d) external interactions; (e) school management; (f) being visible; and (g) health and safety. The principals indicated that they spend most of their time engaged in internal school management

activities (9.57 hours per week). At 55.9%, more than half of the sample indicated that they would prefer to spend less time engaged in these managerial activities. It is therefore unsurprising that principals indicated spending 48.3%, or just under one half, of their time working in their offices. It is also unsurprising that 84.6% of the sample reported *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with their administrative staff.

In terms of duties, responsibilities, accountability, and external influences, more than half of the principals identified four recent policies as having *a lot* of influence on their work: *Growing Success*, *Safe Schools Act*, *Safe and Accepting Schools* (Bill 13), and the *Student Success School Support* initiative. The top three stakeholders groups to whom principals indicated they feel most accountable are students, staff, and parents/community. Most principals also indicated that they feel *respected* or *very respected* by students, teachers, parents, and community leaders.

The principals in this study also indicated that they are satisfied with their work most of the time (79.2%). For example, 94.0% of the sample agreed that they know how to get their job done. Further, 92.4% of the participating principals indicated that their school is a good place to work, and 83.2% felt that their job makes a difference in the school community. However, the survey findings also indicate that French-language principals face multiple challenges in the workplace with some (30.6%) *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* that if they had to do it again they would remain a teacher rather than become a principal; 35% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that if they had a choice, they would work in an industry or sector other than education. Our findings also revealed that principals' work-related challenges are manifested in five areas: (a) mental health and external support, (b) workplace stressors, (c) the policy environment, (d) the community climate, and (e) teaching issues.

Faced with multiple challenges, approximately 80.0% of the surveyed principals reported that their work *often* or *always* puts them in emotionally draining situations. The majority of this emotional exhaustion arises from social interactions: in principals' interactions with students, mental health issues (66.9%) and discipline (62.3%) *often* or *always* result in emotionally draining situations. Regarding teacher interactions, the principals identified dealing with concerns about teacher performance (53.2%), teacher resistance to change (51.1%), and teachers needing high levels of support (50.5%) as some of the most emotionally draining situations they encounter in their daily work. When considering interactions with education administration—such as vice-principals, district school board personnel, and the larger education system—the principals indicated that a lack of special education support/resources (62.7%) and a lack of recognition for principals throughout the education system (55.2%) highly contribute to emotionally draining situations. Thinking beyond the education system to the school community,

48.4% of principals in this study *often* or *always* found that meeting with parents and guardians resulted in emotionally draining situations. A further 44.4% of the sample cited parents/guardians not being involved in their child(ren)'s education as *often* or *always* being emotionally challenging. In terms of workload, there were several interrelated factors that contributed to emotionally draining situations: The three top concerns were perceptions that principals should always be available or "on call" (88.3%), principals' inability to take breaks during the work day (86.7%), and the impossibility of taking a day off or sick day (79.3%).

The principals reported engaging in a variety of coping strategies to deal with emotionally draining days. The most common coping strategies included: talking with colleagues (64.4%), spending time with family and friends (63.3%), and engaging in physical activities or exercise (58.5%). Principals in this study also indicated that if they were harassed, it would most likely be by a parent or guardian (60.1%) and if physically assaulted, it would most likely be by a student (34.6%). When asked how they deal with being harassed and/or assaulted, 51.6% indicated that they report to the superintendent or consult with a colleague (44.1%).

Understandably, only 2.2% of French-language principals reported having work–life balance *all the time*. More realistically, 50.5% of respondents reported that they *never* or *rarely* feel that they have an appropriate balance between work and their personal life. The principals also indicated that they engage in a number of strategies to balance their work and personal life, such as having a support network that consists of family, friends, and colleagues; engaging in hobbies and activities outside of school; and going to the gym. When asked what additional supports they think would help make achieving work–life more manageable, the principals made a number of suggestions related to personnel, such as additional paraprofessionals and vice-principals within the school setting, increased support from superintendents, professional support networks, mentoring, and professional learning in different areas of management.

The recommendations posed in the fourth for education stakeholders, practicing French-language principals, and aspiring principals are intended to ensure that principals are set up for success in their role of school principal.

## Section 1: Introduction

## Study Purpose

In 2018, the Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) commissioned our research team to conduct a study on the changing nature of French-language principals' work. Because of the cultural and linguistic significance of the French Public and French Catholic school systems, this study explored what principals in French public and French Catholic schools do and the motives behind their actions. This study was also guided by the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL) and the recent 2017 Institute for Educational Leadership report by Dr. Marie Josée Berger. As such, in this study we (a) examined how French-language school principals approach their work, (b) documented how principals spend their time, (c) explored the motives and external factors that influence their choices, (d) described the challenges and possibilities their work presents to them, and (e) investigated how work-related challenges impact their health and well-being.

## Organization

This report has four components. The first and present section details the research purpose and rationale. The second describes the methodological approach we used to carry out the study, and the third section delineates the changing nature of French-language school principals' work in Ontario. Finally, the fourth section contains our recommendations for education stakeholders—including prospective and current principals—our recommendations for future research, and our concluding remarks.



## Background and Rationale for the Research

School principals operate within a globalized, complex, competitive, and challenging environment; as a result, the nature of their work has changed. Although these changes have been well represented in the literature and research on teaching (Adams, 2009; Ben-Peretz, 2001; Belfield, 2005; Grimmert & Echols, 2000; Hall, 2004; McGregor, Hooker, Wise, & Devlin, 2010), there is limited new research that focuses on principals, and even less on the work of principals in Ontario's French Public and French Catholic education systems (Berger, 2017). Existing research indicates, however, that school leaders have the second-most influence on student learning after teachers (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Moreover, recent research has revealed a number of emerging trends that hint at changes to principals' work; three drivers of these changes are current policy adjustments (e.g., immigration policies), the changing sociopolitical climate, and new economic constraints (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014; Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Pollock, 2016).

With changing policies, high-stakes accountability initiatives, a standardized curriculum, and a shift toward meeting 21st century educational standards, principals are finding it more challenging to keep up with the pace of their work (Alismail & McGuire, 2015; Gidney, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Kopas, 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Hauseman, Pollock, & Wang, 2017; Paige, 2009; Pollock, 2016, 2017; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015, 2018; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014, 2015; Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018). This growing trend of fast-paced work has reshaped how principals carry out their daily tasks, especially in terms of their increased dependence on email and virtual modes of information and communication technology (ICT) (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2012, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2018). Principals are therefore expected to effectively and efficiently maneuver the technological tools required in the contemporary knowledge economy—an expectation that is inevitably intensifying their work (Haughey, 2006; Marsh, 1997; Pollock, 2016; Wei, Chua, & Kannan, 2016).

Moreover, the centralization of power away from local schools toward governing jurisdictions and school districts (Galaway, Sheppard, Wiens, & Brown, 2013; Pollock, 2008) has reduced principals' autonomy, changed their management tasks, and created an expectation of collaborative decision-making (Court & O'Neil, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014). In addition to their other priorities, principals must tailor their leadership practices to fit the changing dynamics of a culturally diverse environment, which include race, religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Bogotch & Shields, 2014; DeMatthews,

2015; Harvey & Houle, 2006; Howard, 2007; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ryan, 2006).

Recent studies have illustrated that these changes are significantly impacting principals and their work (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2017). Researchers conducted a study in Alberta and found that principals are working an average of 58.5 hours per week—well above the standard 40-hour work week (ATA, 2014). In Ontario, principals have reported that, in addition to working long hours, they struggle with work–life balance (Pollock, 2017). School principals from Ontario’s English-language, secular school districts reported working 58.7 hours per week, with 72% of them feeling pressured to work long hours (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015; Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018); 86.5% indicated that they never seem to have enough time to get their work done (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014). A further, 81.7% of the sample (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014) reported that they were too busy dealing with managerial tasks to give instructional issues the time they felt the issues deserved.

Significantly, scholars have found that the above issues are a manifestation of *work intensification*, and that work intensification is affecting school leaders’ well-being (Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Ontario Principals’ Council, 2017; Pollock, 2016, 2017; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2017). Researchers and policy-makers need to better understand principals’ work to help mitigate these challenges, to enable school systems to attract and retain the best candidates, and to ensure that universities and other training institutions can adequately prepare prospective administrators for the realities of the principalship.

## Section 2: Methodology

We used a quantitative research design that consisted of a focus group and an online survey to conduct this survey. The focus group session helped us refine the survey instrument and establish reliability and validity. Each methodological component of the study is described in greater detail below.

## Data Collection Methods

**Focus groups.** We reviewed and modified the survey instrument 21 times with members of the ADFO Executive Council before piloting the survey in a focus group. This focus group session was used to improve the reliability and validity of the survey; the session included male and female school principals at different stages of their careers from schools that support both rural and urban school communities. The focus group meeting, held in French, lasted over two hours. Eleven French-language principals were asked to discuss their work during the first hour. This discussion concentrated on the influence of policy and how the principals spend their time at work, and the participants identified the challenges and possibilities inherent in their work. The second hour involved participants piloting a draft version of the online survey and providing meaningful feedback on the design and content of the survey questions and response scales. This information helped us refine the survey tool and ensure that it represented the daily work of French-language principals. The information we gathered from the piloted survey helped us improve the survey questions, design, and overall content.

**Online survey.** In an effort to compare results locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally, we adapted two existing surveys—one focusing on principals (2013) and another focusing on vice-principals (2016)—as our launching point. The current ADFO survey has been statistically validated and designed with not only internal reporting in mind but also considerations for external comparisons to other similar workforces. The ADFO survey was modified to reflect the cultural nuances and linguistic requirements set out in the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL). The recent Institute for Educational Leadership Report (2017) by Dr. Marie Josée Berger was also used to guide these modifications. The survey, once online, was piloted among five principals in the ADFO to ensure that the online version of the survey worked. Our research team used their feedback to revise and modify the online survey tool. This iterative process enabled us to represent French-language principals' work with respect to their roles, responsibilities, actions, tasks, behaviours, and practices. Principals gained access to the online survey on November 15, 2018, and it remained open for 36 days. The revised online survey was comprised of 78 questions that required principals to respond about their work in the following 12 sections:

- how they spend their time;
- duties and responsibilities;
- accountability and external influences;
- challenges and possibilities;
- well-being and job satisfaction;
- work–life balance;
- supports;
- the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL);

- professional leadership;
- partnerships;
- personal information;
- school details; and
- comments.

The online survey included both Likert-type and open-ended questions. The survey questions in the format of the five-level Likert scale measured either positive or negative responses to a statement. Some questions included a *non-applicable (N/A)* response option for added measurement accuracy; we posed these questions as even-point scales.

**Sampling.** ADFO members from 12 French-language school boards formed the study sample. Only current members of the ADFO who work in the capacity of principal in an Ontario French-language school participated in the online survey. The ADFO shared 414 principals' email addresses with our research team; we subsequently sent an individualized survey link to each principal. We then used email reminders to encourage principals to participate in the survey.

We received a total of 269 responses. Of these, 180 were complete. Of the incomplete surveys, we only included the eight that had responses to over two-thirds of the total questions. We excluded 80 responses from the analysis because they did not meet the inclusion threshold. A total of 188 valid responses were used for our final analysis. As a result, the response rate for the survey was 45.41%, based on completed and additional partially completed surveys. The sample included principals working in 12 different school districts, located within a broad range of school and community contexts. For example, the average school size for participating principals was 291.82 students, with school sizes ranging from five to 1,320 students. Both elementary and secondary school principals participated in the survey: 72.6% of respondents worked in elementary schools, while 6.3% worked in secondary schools. Only 21.1% of participating principals indicated working in schools that include both elementary and secondary students, as demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1 Participant Characteristics: School Type**

| School Type                     | #   | %     |
|---------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Elementary Principals           | 127 | 72.6% |
| Secondary Principals            | 11  | 6.3%  |
| Elementary/Secondary Principals | 37  | 21.1% |

Both male and female principals participated in the survey. This question was open-ended, allowing for respondents to indicate their gender identity. As displayed in Table 2 below, 65.4% of participating principals self-identified as *female*, with the other 34.6% self-identifying as *male*.

**Table 2 Participant Characteristics: Gender**

| Gender | %     |
|--------|-------|
| Male   | 34.6% |
| Female | 65.4% |

As displayed in Figure 1 below, 57.0% of the participating principals indicated that a bachelor's degree was the highest level of formal education they had completed; 40.2 % of respondents had obtained a master's degree at the time the survey was conducted. Smaller numbers of participating principals obtained other formal qualifications, such as the 2.2 % of respondents who indicated they had earned a professional degree (e.g., MD, LLB, JD, etc.), and the 0.6 % who had obtained a doctorate or other terminal degree.

**Figure 1. Participants Characteristics: Level of Education**

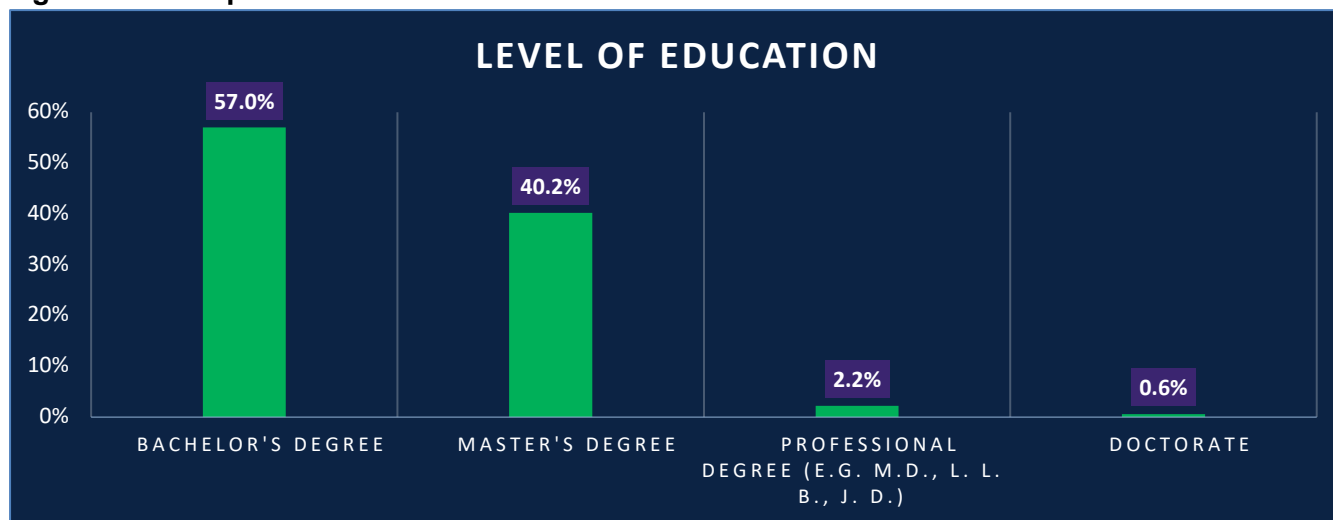
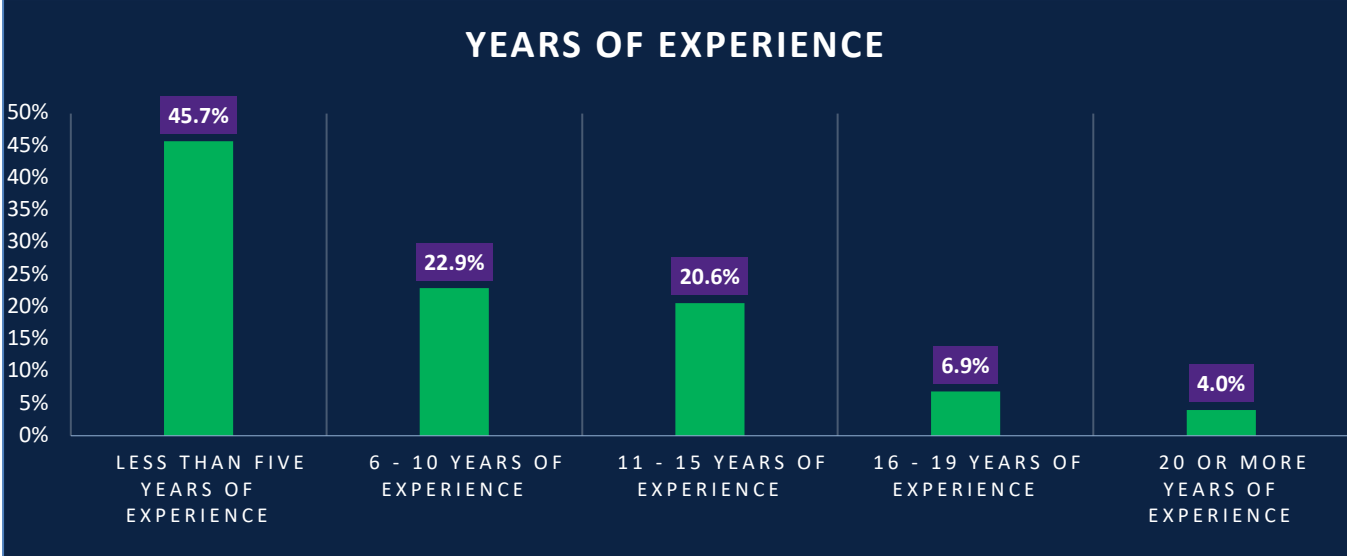


Figure 2 (below) displays the years of experience that the participating principals bring to their work. Respondents had between *less than five years of experience* and *20 or more years of experience* in the role of principal, with an average of 7.69 years of experience across the total sample, and an average of 3.26 years of experience at their current schools. Almost half of the sample (45.7%) had less than five years of experience as a principal. Principals with between six and 10 years of experience were the next largest group, accounting for 22.9% of the sample. A total of 20.6% of the participating principals indicated being in the position for 11–15 years. A smaller number of principals (6.9%) reported having more than 16 years of experience in the role, with an even smaller number (4.0%) having 20 years or more.

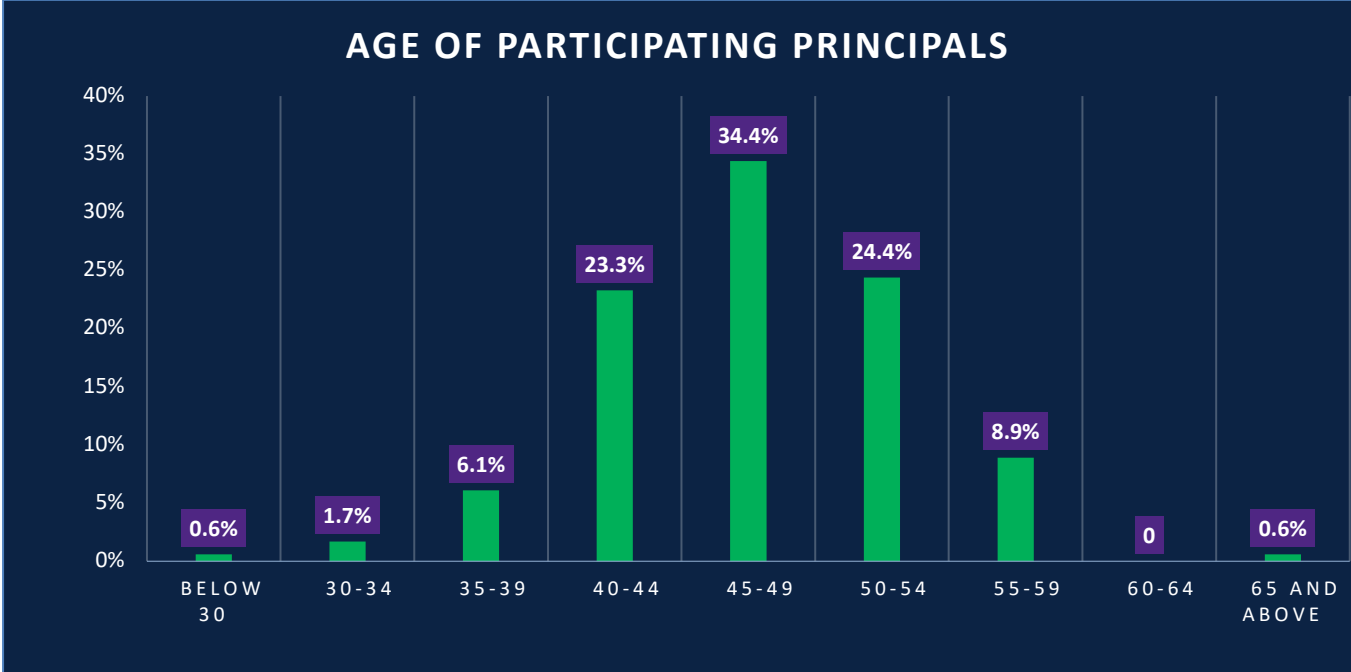
**Figure 2. Participant Characteristics: Years of Experience**



Our analysis showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the years of experience working as a principal between elementary and secondary school principals: ( $t(134) = -1.58, p = .12$ ). Secondary school principals do not tend to have more years of experience ( $M=10.64$ ) than elementary school principals ( $M=7.82$ ). There is also no significant difference in the years of experience principals have working at their current school between those in the elementary and secondary panels: ( $t(10.5) = -1.55, p = .15$ ). Secondary school principals also do not tend to have more years of experience at their current schools ( $M=5.36$ ) than elementary school principals ( $M=3.01$ ).

Figure 3 on the following page graphs the ages of the participating principals by group. For example, 34.4% of the sample were between the ages of 45 and 49 when the survey was conducted. A total of 23.3% of principals who responded to the online survey were between 40 and 44 years of age. Principals aged 50–54 accounted for 24.4% of responses, with an additional 6.1% of principals aged 35–39. Another 8.9% of the principals indicated they were between 55 and 59 years of age. Smaller numbers of participating principals reported they were 30–34 (1.7%), 60–64 (nil), or 65 years of age or older (0.6%).

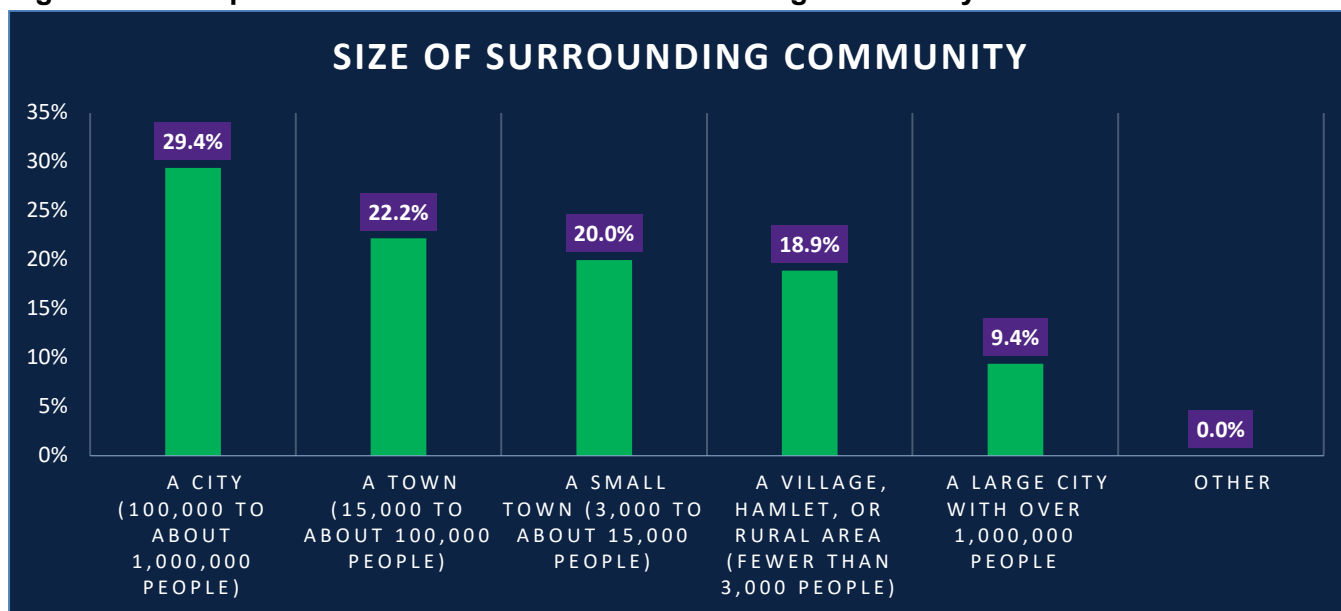
Figure 3. Participant Characteristics: Age of Participating Principals



Principals in general, and ADFO members specifically, are tasked with working in a variety of different demographic contexts. The clear majority of those who responded to the survey (29.4%) work in cities with populations ranging from 100,000 to approximately 1,000,000 people. As displayed in Figure 4 on the following page, an additional 9.4% of participating principals work in large cities with populations of over 1,000,000 people. Principals who work in towns with populations between 15,000 and 100,000 people accounted for 22.2% of the sample, and 20.0% of respondents were employed in schools located in communities with between 3,000 and 15,000 people. An additional 18.9% of principals who participated in the online survey work in rural schools (fewer than 300 people).

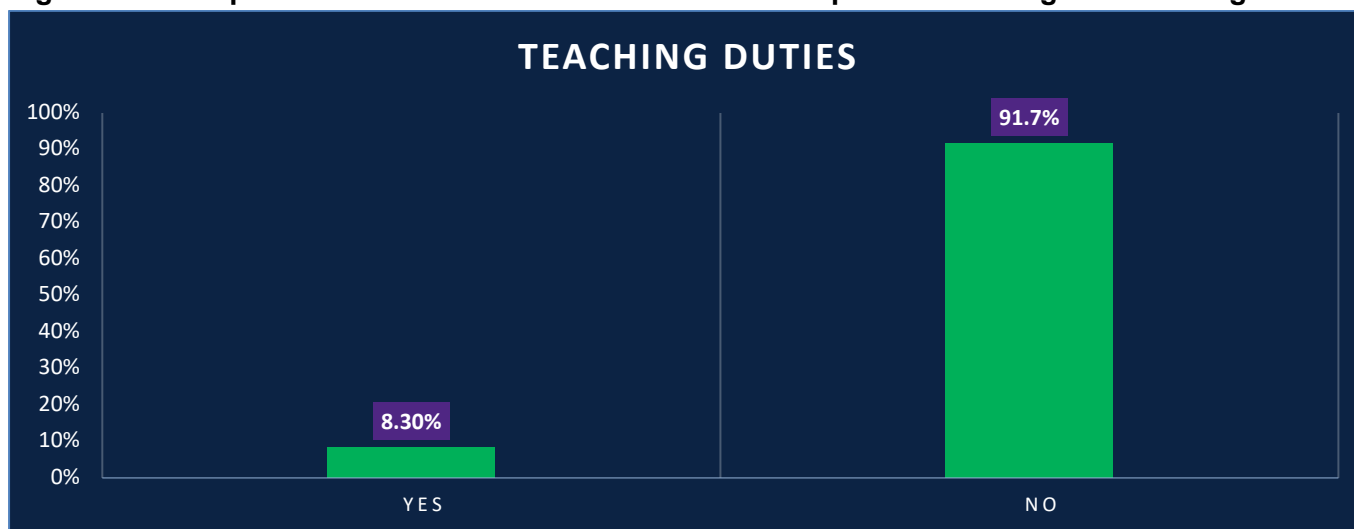


**Figure 4. Participant Characteristics: Size of Surrounding Community**



Both full-time principals and those who had been assigned teaching duties at their current schools participated in the survey. As displayed in Figure 5 (below), 91.7% did not have teaching duties assigned to them. However, 8.3% of participants were assigned teaching duties in addition to their roles and responsibilities as principals.

**Figure 5. Participant Characteristics: Whether or Not Principals Were Assigned Teaching Duties**



The principals in the survey sample had differences in terms of gender, years of experience as a principal, the level of education brought to the role, the types of schools in which they worked, and whether or not teaching was included in their duties. The sample was less diverse in terms of sexual orientation and ethnic background, however. For example, Figure 6 (next page) demonstrates that 92.6% of the participating principals self-identified as *heterosexual*. A total of

0.5% of the sample self-identified as *lesbian or gay*, 2.1% indicated they would prefer not to disclose this information, and 0.5% self-identified as *bisexual*.

**Figure 6. Participant Characteristics: Sexual Orientation**

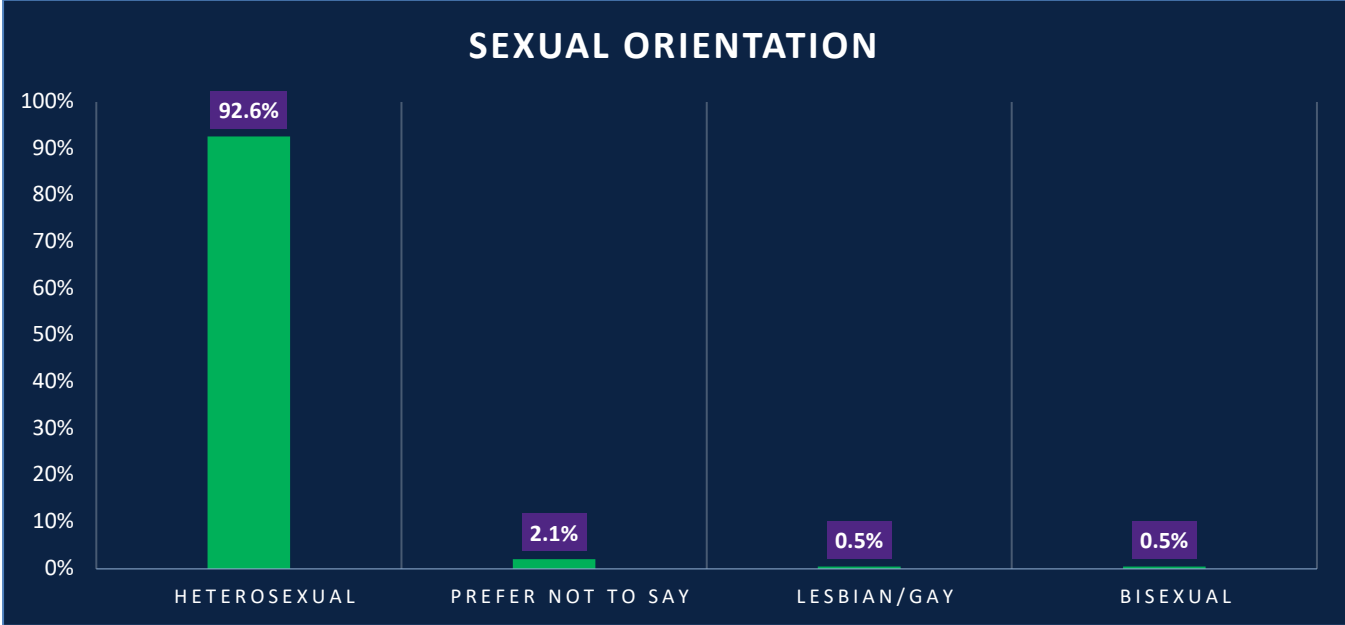
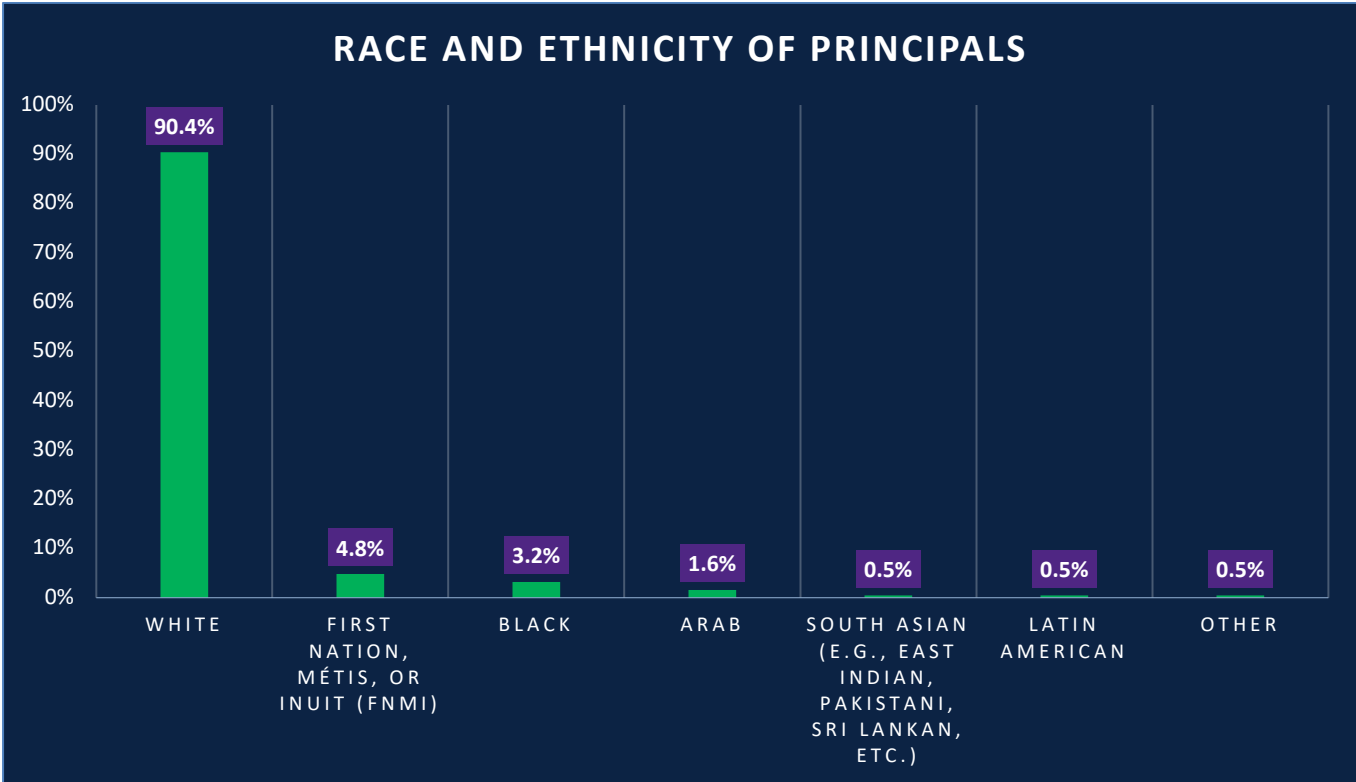


Figure 7 (following page) demonstrates that, in terms of ethnic background, 90.4% of the participating principals described themselves as *White*. An additional 4.8% of the sample self-identified as *First Nation, Métis, or Inuit (FNMI)*, 3.2% self-identified as *Black*, and 1.6% self-identified as *Arab*. Another 0.5% of the sample self-identified as *South Asian*, and a further 0.5% self-identified as *Latin American*. A total of 0.5% of principals answered this question by selecting *Other*.

Figure 7. Participant Characteristics: Race and Ethnicity of Principals



## Data Analysis

We designed the study survey to gather information about principals currently working in Ontario's French-language school systems, and the duties, tasks, practices, and activities they engage in as part of their daily work. We have aggregated the data to provide a snapshot of French-language principals' work in contemporary times, including the challenges and possibilities they face on a daily basis, as well as how they spend their time at work.

We analyzed the study data using SPSS 24. We used descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and cross tabulations, to determine the central tendencies of the variables, including the mean, median, and mode. We used inferential statistics—such as correlations, *t*-tests, multiple regressions, and factor analysis—to compare group means, make predictions on dependent variables, and reduce dimensions/variables to further explore latent variables and their relationships. We occasionally rounded calculations to the nearest decimal, and as a result the calculations may not always add up to 100%.

## Section 3: Findings

In this section, we discuss the key findings that emerged from the survey data. The findings are reported across 10 themes, organized according to the aspects of contemporary principals' work included in the survey. The themes are as follows: (a) how principals spend their time, (b) the duties and responsibilities they perform, (c) accountability and external influences, (d) challenges and possibilities, (e) well-being and job satisfaction, (f) work–life balance, (g) the level of support principals currently receive from external organizations, (h) the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL), (i) principals' professional learning needs, and (j) the influence of school–community partnerships on their work and workload.

## Theme 1: How French-Language Principals Spend Their Time

The principals who responded to the survey indicated spending, on average, 57.5 hours working per week, with 97.9% of the sample consistently working more than a standard 40-hour work week. The number of hours these principals work per week ranged from nine to 90. Only one principal reported spending 90 hours, which sounds unrealistic but may reflect the number of hours the principal spent during the week when she or he was filling out the survey. If 90 is not included, the range is from nine to 80 hours.

We conducted a factor analysis to explore underlying patterns in how principals spend their time on work-related activities. Results of the factor analysis are depicted in Table 3 on the following page. The analysis results show that principals spend their time mainly in seven areas: *well-being, service delivery, and professional learning (PL)* (12.88%); *social interaction management* (9.57%); *budget and instructional leadership* (9.51%); *external interactions* (9.30%); *school management* (8.45%); *being visible* (7.58%); and *health and safety* (5.38%). In total, 63.16% of the total picture (of all the work-related activities) is accounted for or explained by these seven factors.

Table 3 also shows the seven factors and their loadings—the amount that each variable contributes to the factor in question. For example, the variable *student well-being* contributed the most to the factor *well-being, service delivery, and PL*, with a factor loading of .938; this factor loading indicates that, among the four work-related activities associated with *well-being, service delivery, and PL* (including *student well-being, staff well-being, French-language services, and principals' professional learning*), principals spend more time on student well-being than any other activity. Similarly, the variable *working with parents* contributed the most to the factor *social interaction and management* with a factor loading of .733, which indicates that, in social interaction and management, principals spend more time working with parents than conducting other activities such as *personnel, student discipline, student-related activities, and student transportation*.

**Table 3 Factors on How French-Language Principals Spend Their Time**

| Work-Related Activities                 | Well-Being, Service Delivery, & PL | Social Interaction Management | Budget & Instructional Leadership | External Interactions | School Management | Being Visible | Health & Safety |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Students' well-being                    | <b>.938</b>                        | .002                          | .033                              | .078                  | .175              | -.010         | .021            |
| Staff well-being                        | <b>.847</b>                        | .074                          | -.113                             | -.066                 | .374              | .007          | .057            |
| French-language services                | <b>.838</b>                        | -.024                         | .268                              | .052                  | -.093             | .069          | -.030           |
| Principals' professional learning       | <b>.466</b>                        | .106                          | .446                              | .304                  | -.330             | .122          | -.022           |
| Working with parents                    | .082                               | <b>.733</b>                   | .196                              | -.034                 | .021              | -.023         | -.032           |
| Personnel                               | .162                               | <b>.572</b>                   | .511                              | -.030                 | .174              | .172          | -.090           |
| Student discipline                      | -.128                              | <b>.569</b>                   | -.116                             | -.140                 | .209              | .082          | .113            |
| Student-related activities              | .136                               | <b>.559</b>                   | -.018                             | .352                  | -.270             | .179          | -.082           |
| Student transportation                  | -.081                              | <b>.506</b>                   | -.207                             | .300                  | .122              | .205          | .267            |
| Budget                                  | .062                               | .043                          | <b>.726</b>                       | .051                  | .260              | .073          | -.009           |
| Curriculum and instructional leadership | .043                               | -.002                         | <b>.710</b>                       | .106                  | -.090             | .057          | .245            |
| Room rental                             | -.040                              | -.157                         | -.055                             | <b>.724</b>           | .193              | .011          | .051            |
| Community                               | .063                               | .235                          | .028                              | <b>.687</b>           | -.062             | -.057         | .045            |
| Work with diocese/church                | .149                               | -.150                         | .329                              | <b>.582</b>           | .050              | .056          | -.056           |
| District school board office committees | -.055                              | .231                          | .198                              | <b>.462</b>           | .154              | -.350         | -.254           |
| Supporting students with special needs  | .249                               | .202                          | -.117                             | .116                  | <b>.716</b>       | -.103         | -.010           |

|                                |      |      |      |       |             |             |             |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Building maintenance           | .031 | .032 | .185 | .181  | <b>.685</b> | .212        | .237        |
| Internal school management     | .104 | .011 | .266 | -.029 | <b>.529</b> | .232        | -.252       |
| Classroom walk-throughs        | .049 | .118 | .077 | -.034 | .031        | <b>.785</b> | .088        |
| Visibility and supervision     | .003 | .130 | .125 | .014  | .149        | <b>.772</b> | -.149       |
| Occupational health and safety | .037 | .066 | .181 | -.017 | .042        | -.039       | <b>.861</b> |

Notes: Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a. Rotation converged in nine iterations.

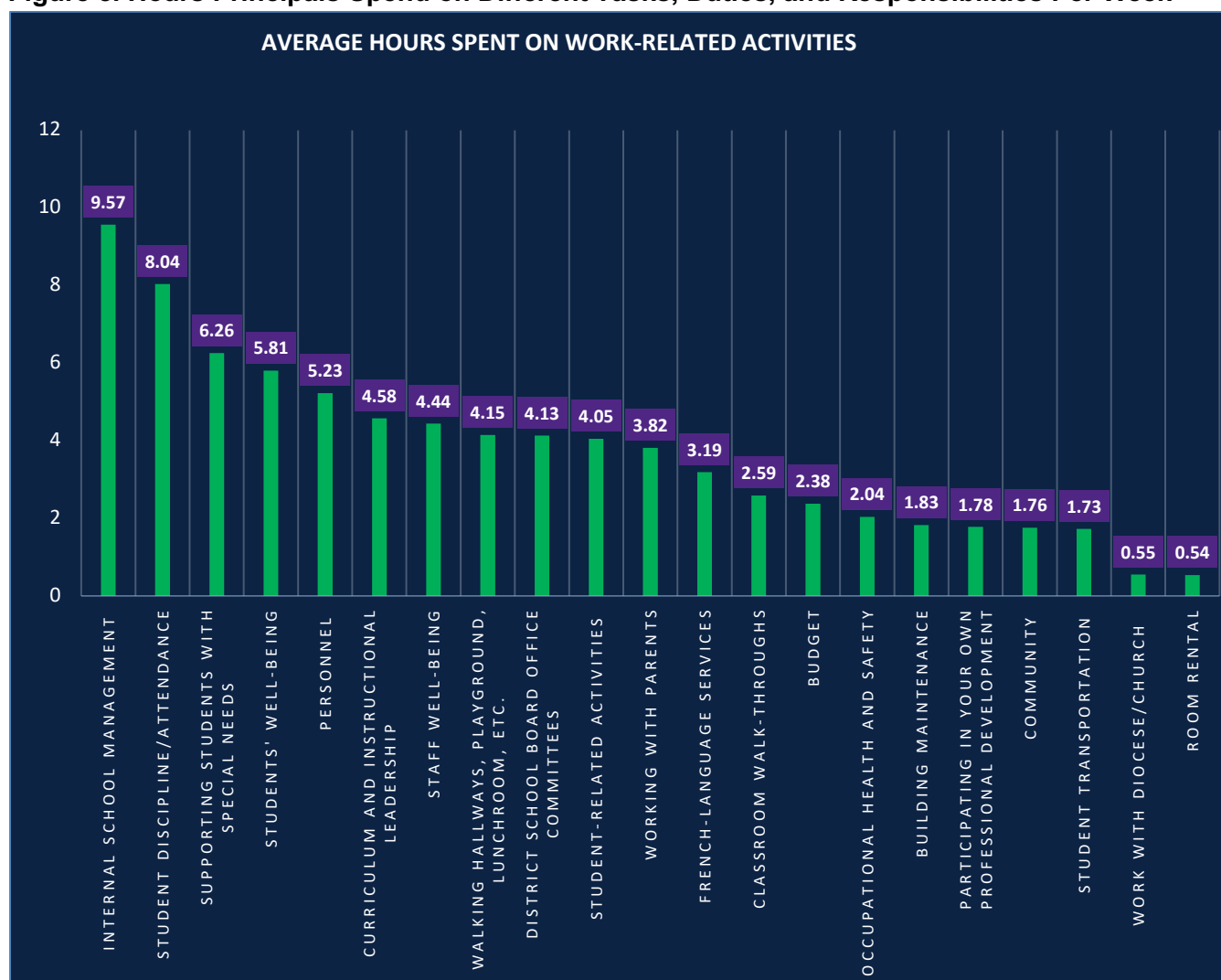
We conducted a linear regression analysis to further explore how different work-related activities and tasks predict the amount of time principals spend on their work per week. The results show that *curriculum and instructional leadership* ( $\beta = .67, p = 0$ ) is the only significant predictor to the amount of time principals spend on work each week. For every one hour rise in the time spent on curriculum and instructional leadership, there are approximately .67 hour rises in the amount of time principals spend on work each week. A similar test shows that a linear combination of formal and informal meetings, emails, phone, text messaging, social media, school newsletters, and other modes of communication were significantly related to the average amount of time principals spend on work per week,  $F(8, 118) = 2.49, p = .02$ . However, no variables significantly predict the average amount of time they spend each week on communication.

We conducted further analysis by looking into some social and contextual factors (e.g., gender, school type, size, etc.) that could impact how principals spend their time. The results show that gender, educational backgrounds, age, school size and type, and years of experience as a teacher and principal are not significant predictors to the average amount of time principals spend at work per week.

Our findings also provide greater insight into the duties, tasks, and activities principals engage in as part of their daily work. As displayed in Figure 8 on the following page, the principals indicated that they spend most of their time engaged in internal school management activities (9.57 hours per week). At 55.9%, more than half of the sample indicated that they would prefer to spend less time engaged in these managerial activities. The surveyed principals also reported spending approximately eight hours per week attending to student discipline and attendance—a number that 50.0% of the participating principals would like to decrease.



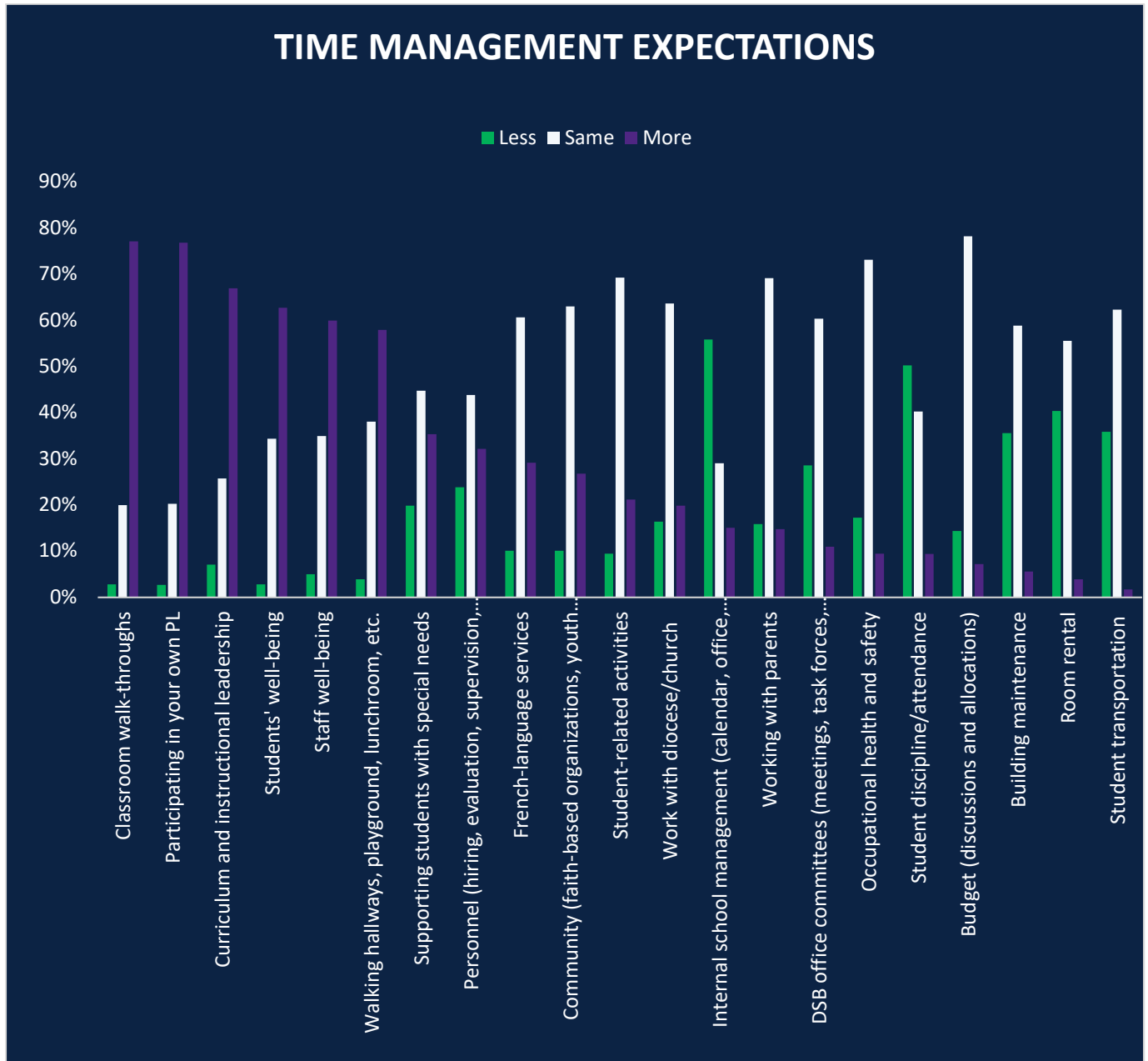
**Figure 8. Hours Principals Spend on Different Tasks, Duties, and Responsibilities Per Week**



On average, the principals reported spending 6.26 hours per week engaged in activities that *support students with special needs*: 35.4% would like to spend *more* time supporting students with special needs, while 44.8% felt they are spending an appropriate amount of time in this area. The principals reported dedicating 5.81 hours per week to student well-being and 5.23 hours each week to tasks involving personnel.

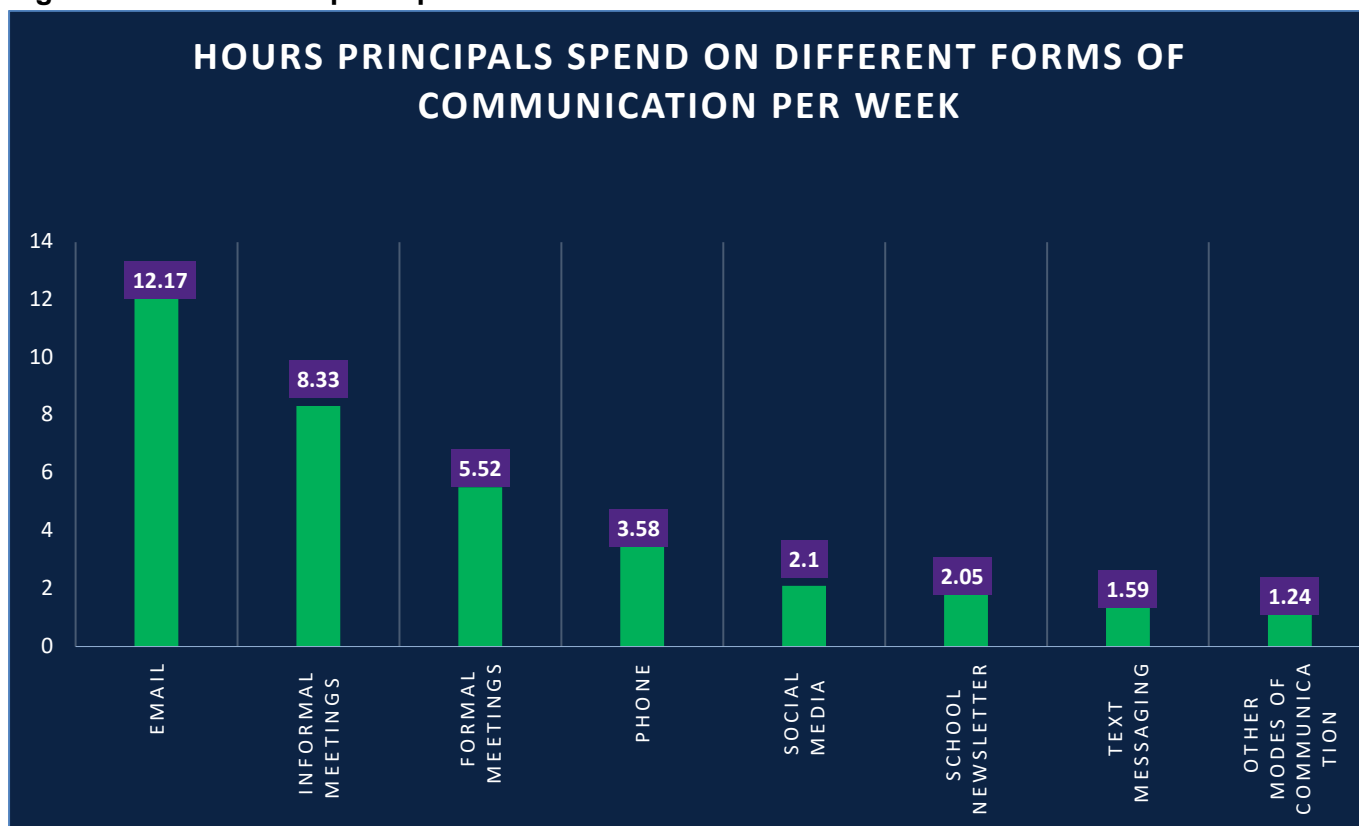
On the following page, Figure 9 demonstrates the top five work-related activities upon which principals would like to spend *more* time: classroom walk throughs (77.2%), participating in their own professional learning (76.9%), curriculum and instructional leadership (67%), students' well-being (62.8%), and staff well-being (60.0%). The five major activities upon which the principals would like to spend *less* time are: internal school management (55.9%), student discipline/attendance (50.3%), room rentals (40.4%), student transportation (35.9%), and building maintenance (35.6%).

Figure 9. Time Management Expectations



The online survey also asked principals to document the total number of hours they spend using different forms of communication as part of a normal work week. On average, participating principals indicated that they spend the most time on email, which takes up 12.17 hours per week. The time spent on email ranged between one and 35 hours per week, and 84.2% of the sample responded that they would like to spend less time on email.

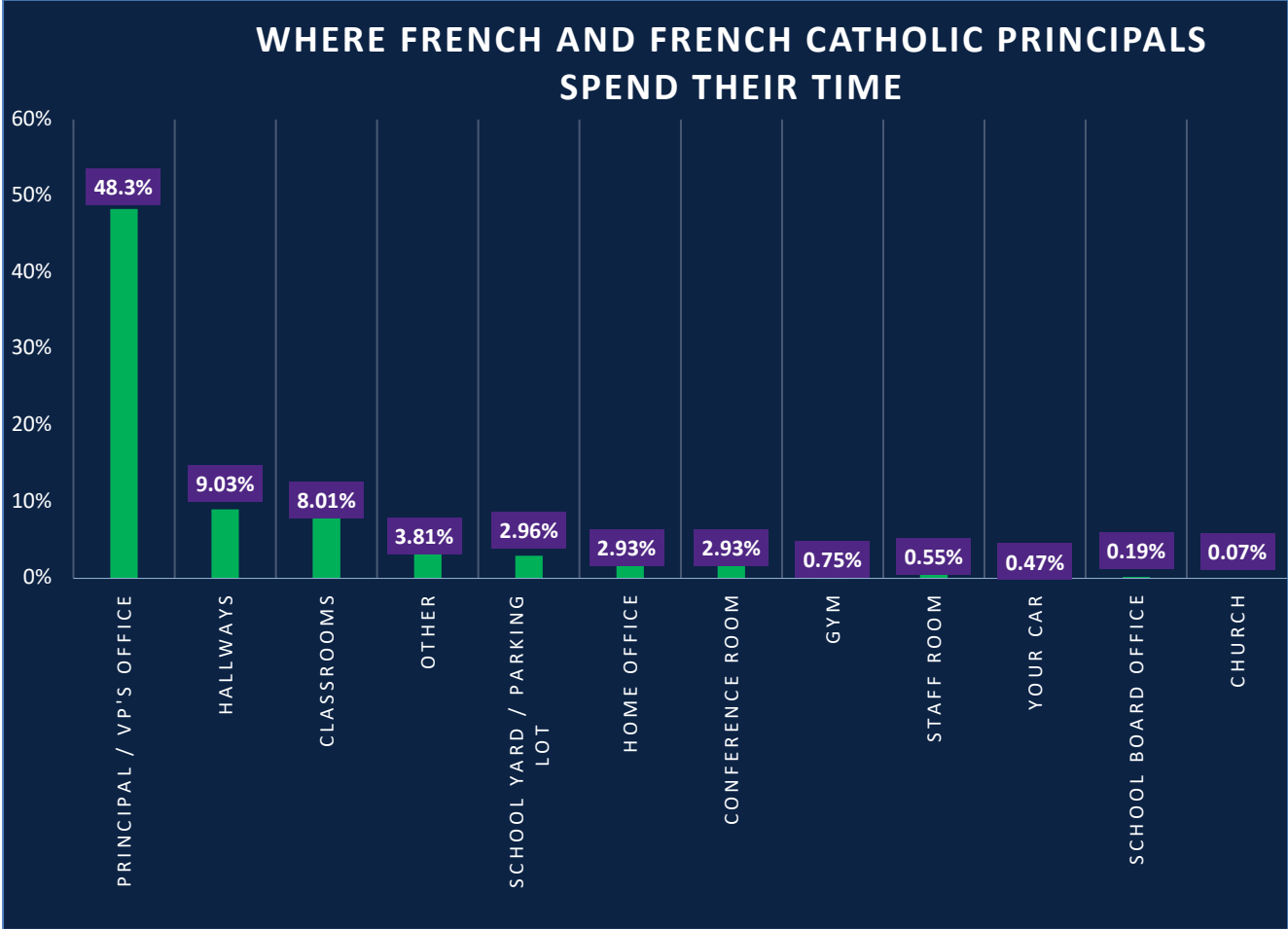
**Figure 10. Hours Principals Spend on Different Forms of Communication: Per Week**



As displayed in Figure 10 above, principals also indicated spending 8.33 hours per week in informal meetings; 5.52 hours per week engaged in formal, prescheduled meetings; 3.58 hours per week on the telephone; and 2.1 hours per week on social media platforms. Text messaging accounted for 1.59 of principals' weekly work hours, with 1.24 hours spent on other modes of communication.

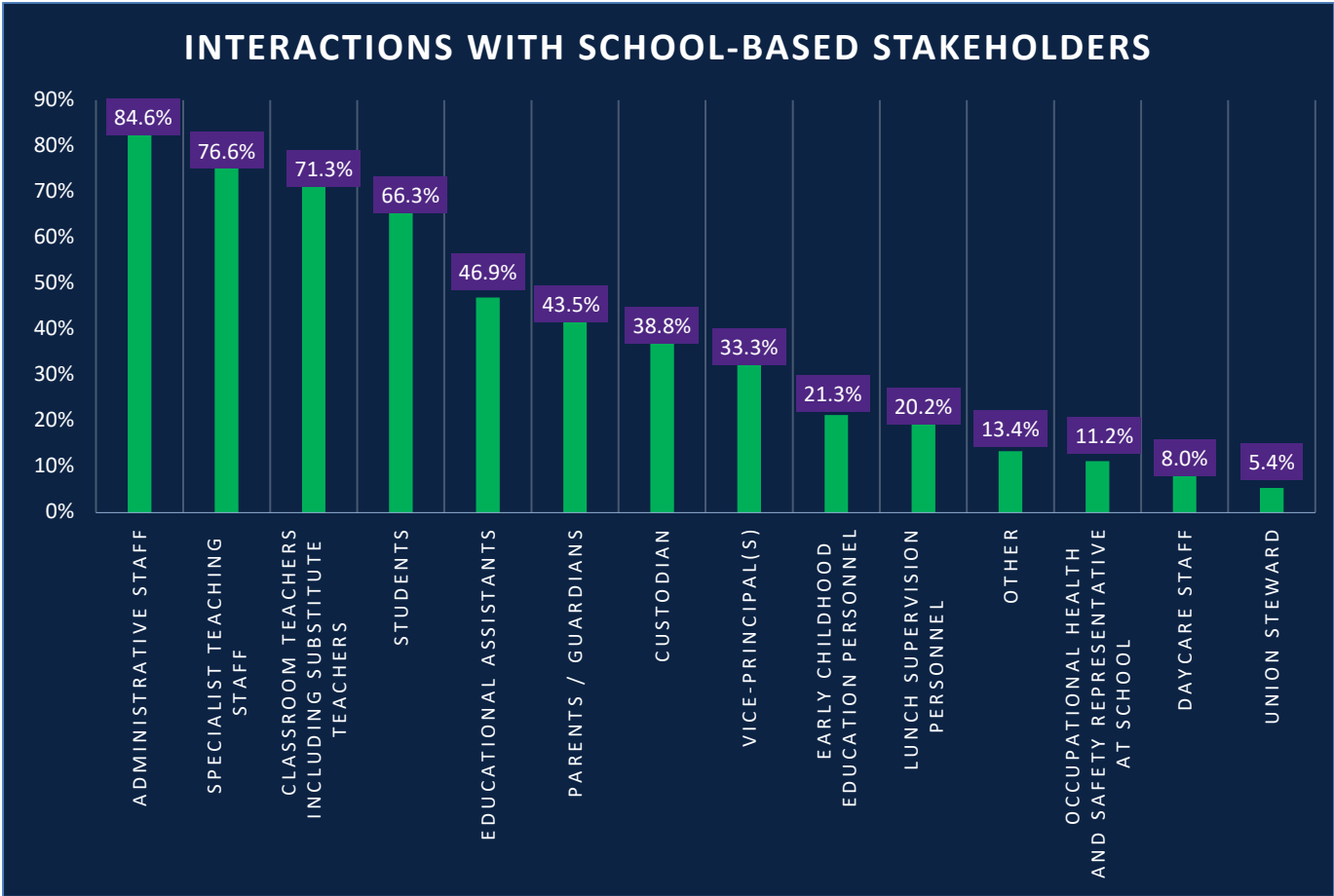
Moreover, the contemporary principalship is a mobile position: their duties and responsibilities require principals to spend time in many different locations both on and off the school site. For example, as displayed in Figure 11 on the next page, principals indicated spending 48.3%, or just under half, of their time working in their office. Participants also reported spending a total of 9.03% of their time in the hallways of the school, and 8.01% of their time in various classrooms. Principals are often expected to complete work tasks at home, which explains why respondents indicated spending 2.93% of their time working in their home office. Supervising students can also be part of principals' work, which explains why they indicated spending 2.96% of their time in the school yard or the school parking lot. Participating principals indicated spending approximately 2.93% of their time in the school conference room, and less than 2.0% each in their car, the gym, the cafeteria, the board central office, and the staff room; they also indicated that they spend 3.81% of their time in *other* areas.

Figure 11. Where French-Language Principals Spend Their Time



Principals’ work involves different levels of interaction with a variety of stakeholders. For example, Figure 12 on the following page displays the level of interaction principals reported having with stakeholders who were both *internal* and *external* to the school. In terms of school-based stakeholders, participating principals had the highest level of interaction with their administrative staff, specialist teachers, classroom teachers, students, and parents. A total of 84.6% of the sample reported *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with their administrative staff, which not only highlights the important role of administrative assistants in supporting contemporary principals but also that the majority of principals’ work is managerial in nature. A total of 76.6% of the surveyed principals also reported having *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with specialist teachers, while 71.3% reported *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with classroom teachers. Students were the fourth highest stakeholder group with whom principals spend time interacting, as 66.3% of the participants reported having *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with students. The principalship also involves working with parents/guardians, a stakeholder group with whom 43.5% of principals have *high* levels of interaction.

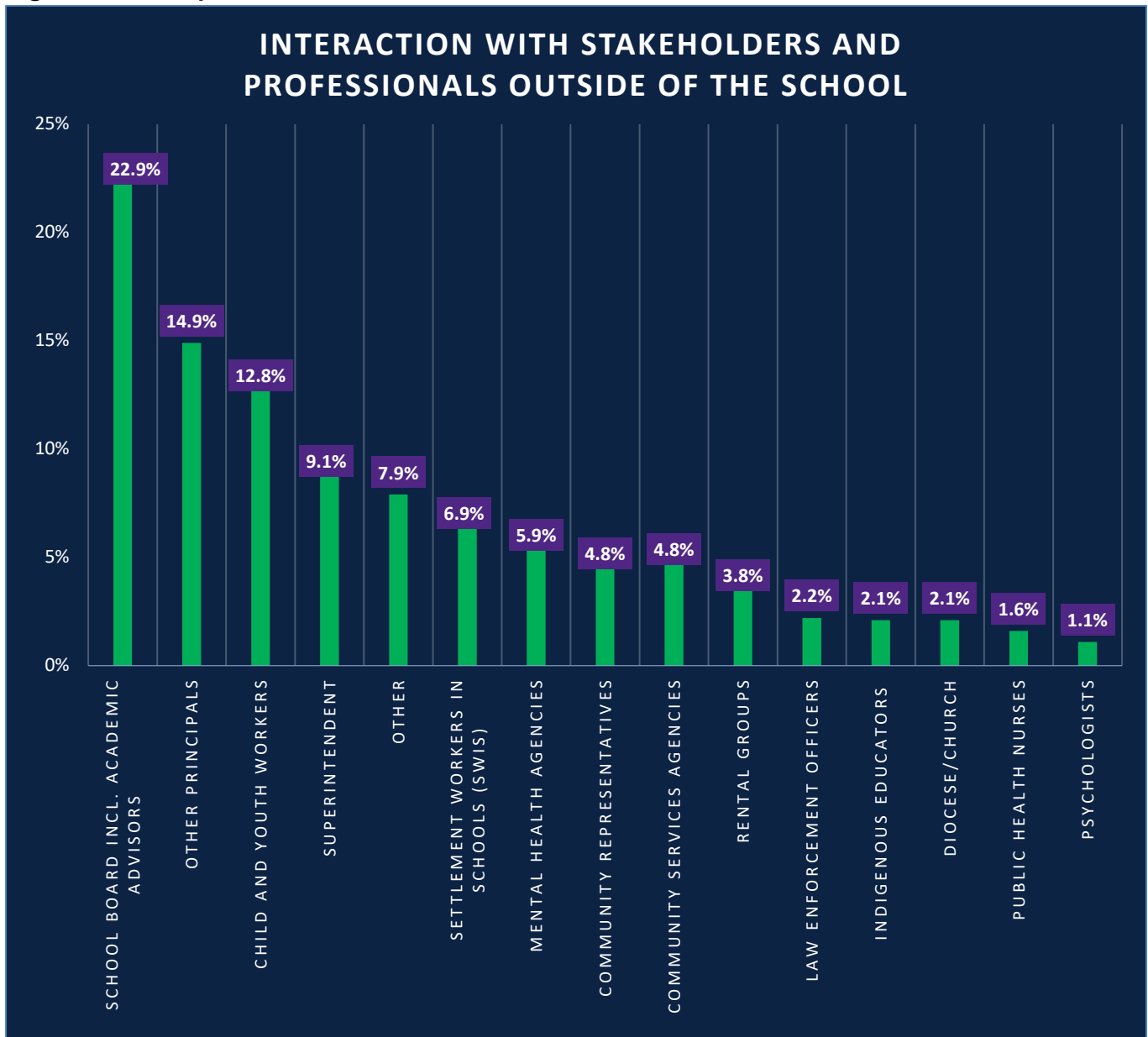
Figure 12. Interactions with School-Based Stakeholders



We used *t*-tests to investigate whether or not the extent of principals’ interaction with different stakeholders differed by gender. The results show there is no significant difference between male and female principals in their interactions with various stakeholders.

Principals’ work also involves interacting with stakeholders and personnel who are not employed by their school or otherwise directly affiliated with the school. As displayed in Figure 13 on the following page, it appears that principals had little interaction with and received little support from individuals located outside of the school. Of those with whom they did interact, 22.9% of the participating principals indicated having *high* or *very high* levels of interaction with district school board members. This is unsurprising, given that the district school board is the employer of school principals. Next, principals reported varied levels of interaction with other principals (14.9%) and Child and Youth workers (12.8%).

Figure 13. Principals' Interaction with Stakeholders and Professionals Outside of the School



As depicted in Table 4 on the next page, similar tests showed that significant differences exist between elementary and secondary school principals in their interactions with the following school-based stakeholders: parents/guardians ( $t(134) = 2.16, p = .03$ ), educational assistants ( $t(136) = 2.12, p = .04$ ), custodians ( $t(136) = 2.90, p = 0$ ), early childhood education personnel ( $t(126) = 25.43, p = 0$ ), daycare staff ( $t(136) = 5.0, p = 0$ ), lunch supervision personnel ( $t(136) = 5.06, p = 0$ ), and other stakeholders ( $t(64) = 7.58, p = 0$ ). The results indicate that elementary school principals are more likely to interact with parents/guardians, educational assistants, custodians, early childhood education personnel, daycare staff, lunch supervision personnel, and other stakeholders than secondary school principals. This is probably due to the nature of

how secondary school administrative teams are structured—for example, with additional administrators such as vice-principals.

**Table 4 Interactions with School-Based Stakeholders Based on School Type**

| Stakeholders                        | School type | N   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Parents/guardians                   | Elementary  | 125 | 3.5680 | .93616         | .08373          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | 2.9091 | 1.30035        | .39207          |
| Educational assistants              | Elementary  | 127 | 3.6378 | 1.07400        | .09530          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | 2.9091 | 1.30035        | .39207          |
| Custodians                          | Elementary  | 127 | 3.4646 | .89793         | .07968          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | 2.6364 | 1.02691        | .30963          |
| Early childhood education personnel | Elementary  | 127 | 2.9134 | 1.29114        | .11457          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | .0000  | .00000         | .00000          |
| Daycare staff                       | Elementary  | 127 | 2.2283 | 1.13522        | .10073          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | .4545  | 1.03573        | .31228          |
| Lunch supervision personnel         | Elementary  | 127 | 2.9528 | 1.04546        | .09277          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 11  | 1.2727 | 1.19087        | .35906          |
| Other                               | Elementary  | 65  | 1.5846 | 1.68534        | .20904          |
|                                     | Secondary   | 5   | .0000  | .00000         | .00000          |

We used a *t*-test to discern whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary schools in their interactions with stakeholders and professionals outside their schools. The results show that secondary school principals ( $M=2.73$ ) are more likely to interact with mental health agencies ( $t(136) = -4.62, p = 0$ ) than elementary school principals ( $M=1.39$ ).

## Theme 2: Duties and Responsibilities

Table 5 below displays a list of the recent provincial policies that influence the work of French-language principals. More than half of the principals identified four recent policies as having a *lot* of influence on their work. *Growing Success*, a policy outlining assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario schools, has a *lot* of influence on the work of 77.7% of the participating principals. A total of 71.3% of principals in this study pointed to the *Safe Schools Act* as having a *lot* of influence on their work. *Safe and Accepting Schools* (Bill 13), a piece of provincial anti-bullying legislation, has a *lot* of influence on the work of 64.4% of the principals in the study, while 59.6% indicated that the *Student Success School Support* initiative has a large impact on what they do on a daily basis.

**Table 5 Provincial Policies that Influence Principals' Work**

| Duties and Responsibilities  | A lot | Sometimes | A little | None | N/S  |
|--|-------|-----------|----------|------|------|
| Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools                           | 77.7% | 19.7%     | 2.1%     | 0.5% | nil  |
| Safe Schools Act: Bill 212 (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)                              | 71.3% | 23.4%     | 1.6%     | 2.7% | 1.1% |
| Safe and Accepting Schools: Bill 13 (Anti-Bullying)  | 64.4% | 26.6%     | 8.0%     | 1.1% | nil  |
| Student Success School Support Initiative (SSSSI)  | 59.6% | 32.4%     | 5.9%     | 1.6% | 0.5% |
| Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy  | 44.1% | 36.7%     | 17.0%    | 1.6% | 0.5% |
| Information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and management                       | 43.1% | 39.9%     | 13.3%    | 3.2% | 0.5% |
| Actualisation linguistique en français (ALF)   | 32.6% | 38.0%     | 21.4%    | 4.8% | 3.2% |
| Occupational Health and Safety Act (including Bill 168 changes: workplace harassment and violence) | 31.6% | 42.8%     | 22.5%    | 3.2% | nil  |



|   |       |       |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Full Day Kindergarten: Full Day Early Learning Statute Amendment Act                    | 31.4% | 25.0% | 14.4% | 9.6%  | 19.7% |
| Collaborative professionalism (PPM 159)   | 31.2% | 46.8% | 16.1% | 3.2%  | 2.7%  |
| Bill 115 (Putting Students First Act)   | 28.5% | 43.0% | 19.4% | 8.1%  | 1.1%  |
| Politique d'aménagement linguistique (PAL) de l'Ontario (2004)                          | 27.8% | 38.0% | 28.9% | 4.3%  | 1.1%  |
| Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy  | 16.5% | 38.3% | 36.7% | 7.4%  | 1.1%  |
| Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants (PANA)   | 11.2% | 16.5% | 33.5% | 21.3% | 17.6% |
| Fluctuating Enrolment/School Closures (ARC)   | 9.2%  | 13.6% | 21.7% | 32.6% | 22.8% |
| Truth and Reconciliation  | 7.0%  | 16.1% | 32.3% | 24.7% | 19.9% |
| Aboriginal Education Strategy / First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) Policy Framework | 6.4%  | 24.5% | 51.1% | 16.0% | 2.1%  |
| Urban Priority High Schools (UPHS) Initiative   | 3.2%  | 5.9%  | 6.5%  | 25.4% | 58.9% |

## Theme 3: Accountability and External Influences

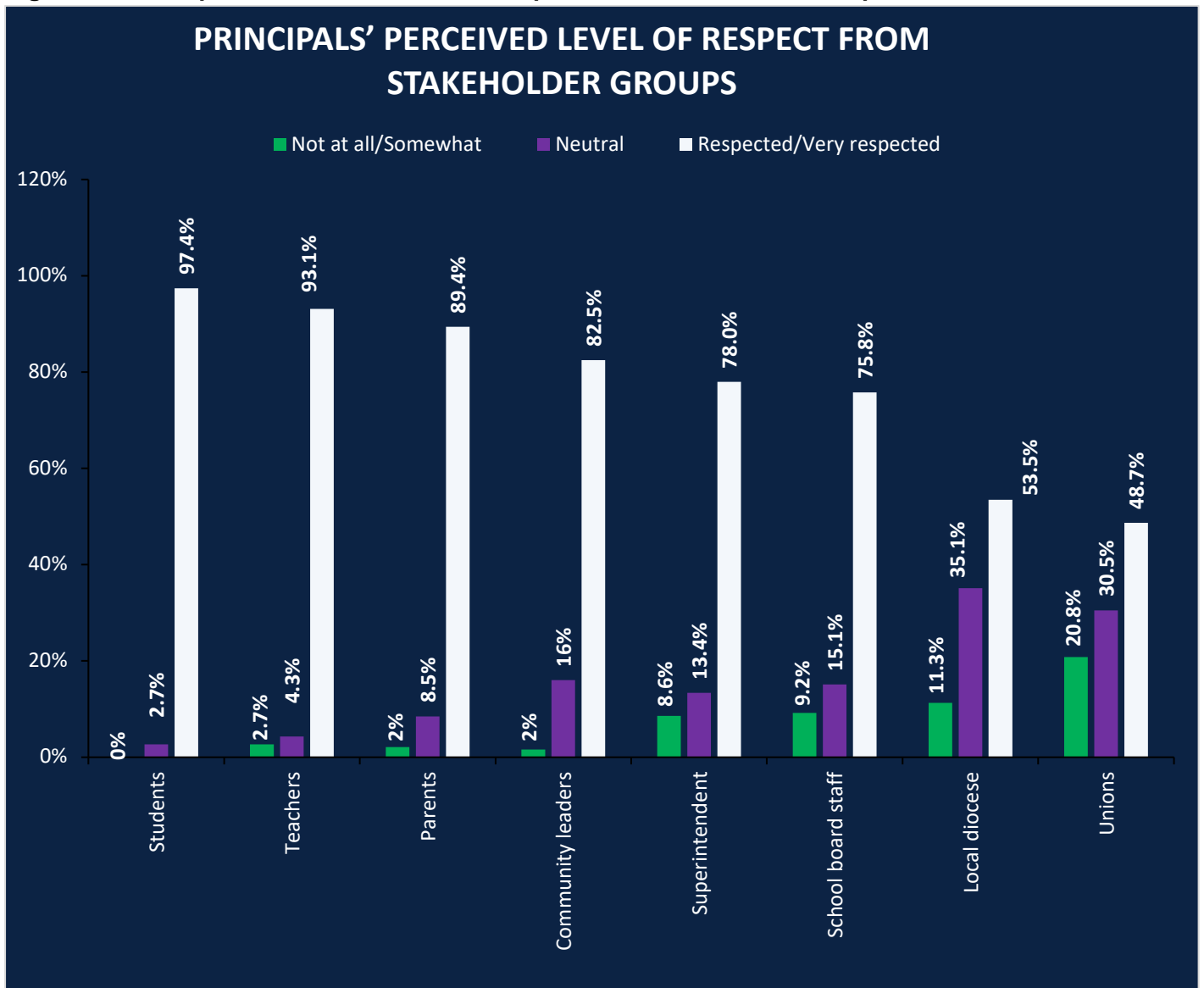
Principals were asked to rank the seven stakeholder groups to whom they feel the most (1) to least (7) accountable in their daily work. The complete rankings are listed below:

1. The students;
2. Their staff ;
3. Parents/Community;
4. Employer;
5. Ministry of Education;
6. Themselves/Family; and
7. God/church/synagogue/mosque.

French-language principals indicated that the top three groups to whom they feel most accountable in their daily work are students, their staff, and parents/community, respectively.

Figure 14 on the following page displays the level of respect principals feel they receive from different stakeholder groups. Most principals who responded to this question indicated feeling *respected* or *very respected* by students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. A small portion of participating principals indicated that they do not feel respected *at all* by the teacher unions (4.8%).

Figure 14. Principals' Perceived Level of Respect from Stakeholder Groups



## Theme 4: Challenges and Responsibilities

The survey also asked principals to identify some of the key challenges they face in their work. Displayed in Table 6 on the following page, our factor analysis showed that principals' work-related challenges fall into the following five areas:

- mental health and external support;
- workplace stressors;
- policy environment;
- community climate; and
- teaching issues.

These five factors accounted for 57.27% of the total variance, which implies that they significantly affect principals' work. Table 6 (below) shows how each variable correlates with each of the five factors mentioned above; the factors are displayed across the first row, and the variables associated with each of the factors are displayed in the left column. The number beside each variable indicates the strength of correlation, and the minus sign indicates when correlations were negative. For example, the variable *constantly adopting new programs* (factor loading = .84) was significantly connected to the factor *policy environment*, which indicates that constantly adopting new programs is the biggest indicator of the policy environment. *Provincial mandates* (loading = .83), *lack of recognition for school principals* (loading = .58), and *lack of qualified substitute teachers* (loading = .39), are also strongly correlated to *policy environment*, suggesting that these activities also constitute the policy environment that impacts principals' work.

**Table 6** Factor Analysis Results on Challenges and Possibilities

| Challenges  | Mental Health & External Support | Work-place Stressors | Policy Environment | Community Climate | Teaching Issues |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Mental health issues among school staff                           | <b>.690</b>                      | .046                 | .107               | .226              | .290            |
| Parents/guardians apathetic or irresponsible about their children | <b>.645</b>                      | .343                 | .168               | .247              | -.038           |
| Mental health issues among students/parents                       | <b>.637</b>                      | .190                 | .338               | .156              | .032            |

|   |             |             |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Union issues  | <b>.594</b> | .055        | .107        | .097        | .443        |
| Level of support from the school's community                    | <b>.571</b> | .233        | .032        | .350        | .133        |
| Lack of time for teacher planning and PL                        | .146        | <b>.823</b> | .063        | .057        | .036        |
| Lack of time to evaluate teachers                               | .005        | <b>.672</b> | .250        | .141        | .191        |
| Student discipline  | .311        | <b>.507</b> | .278        | .000        | .094        |
| Limited trust between teachers and parents/guardians            | .281        | <b>.452</b> | -.150       | .396        | .290        |
| Constantly adopting new programs                                | -.038       | .133        | <b>.837</b> | .237        | .092        |
| Provincial mandates   | .137        | .150        | <b>.831</b> | .031        | .103        |
| Lack of recognition for principals                              | .330        | .026        | <b>.577</b> | -.074       | .099        |
| Lack of qualified substitute teachers                           | .239        | .346        | <b>.389</b> | -.278       | .292        |
| Negative stereotypes about this school's community              | .254        | .012        | -.032       | <b>.778</b> | .121        |
| Racial or ethnic tensions in the school's community             | .034        | .017        | .127        | <b>.724</b> | .222        |
| Social problems in the school's community                       | .307        | .175        | .037        | <b>.715</b> | -.059       |
| Difficulty terminating underperforming teachers from the school | .195        | .027        | .123        | .172        | <b>.702</b> |
| Teacher turnover  | -.042       | .132        | .147        | .176        | <b>.683</b> |
| Difficulty recruiting and hiring the right teachers             | .143        | .416        | .314        | -.132       | <b>.494</b> |
| Lack of teacher knowledge and skills                            | .344        | .414        | -.075       | .047        | <b>.480</b> |
| Teacher and staff apathy and resistance to change               | .252        | .343        | -.046       | .277        | <b>.402</b> |
| Lack of SE support/resources                                    | .314        | .090        | .338        | -.192       | <b>.379</b> |

Notes: Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a. Rotation converged in eight iterations.

## Theme 5: Well-Being and Job Satisfaction

The World Health Organization (2014) has defined mental health as, “A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” Our understanding of well-being in this study is consistent with this definition. Even though 79.2% of principals indicated feeling satisfied with their work *most of the time* and 94.0% of them also *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they know how to get their job done, 30.6% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that if they had to do it again, they would remain a teacher rather than become a principal and 35.0% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that if they had a choice, they would work in an industry/sector other than education. Even though French-language principals face a number of work-related challenges, 92.4% of participating principals *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their school is a good place to work, and 83.2% indicated that their job makes a difference in the school community.

A total of 80.3% of principals also reported their work *often* or *always* puts them in emotionally draining situations. Follow-up *t*-tests indicated that there was no difference between male and female or elementary and secondary school principals in their perceptions of emotionally draining situations. This may be due to the low percentage of secondary principals in the study sample. Similarly, principals’ age, work experience, and school size were not significant predictors of whether or not they perceived their work as putting them in emotionally draining situations.

Social interactions with a wide range of stakeholders may lead to emotionally draining situations for school principals. The following figures (15–18) present emotionally draining situations that result from various issues concerning students, teachers, vice-principals, and school communities. Emotionally draining situations resulting from principals’ workload are presented in Figure 19.

Figure 15. Principals' Emotionally Draining Situations: Students

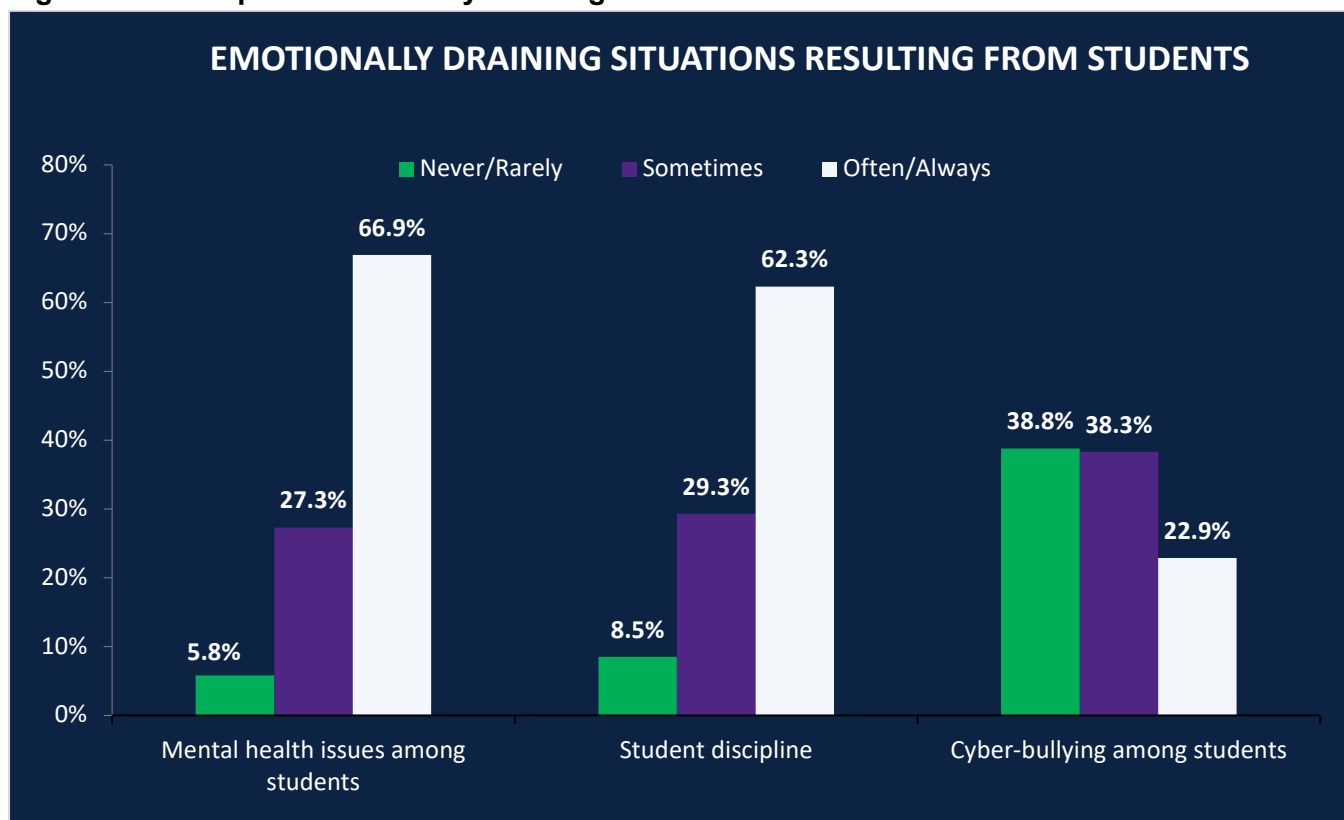
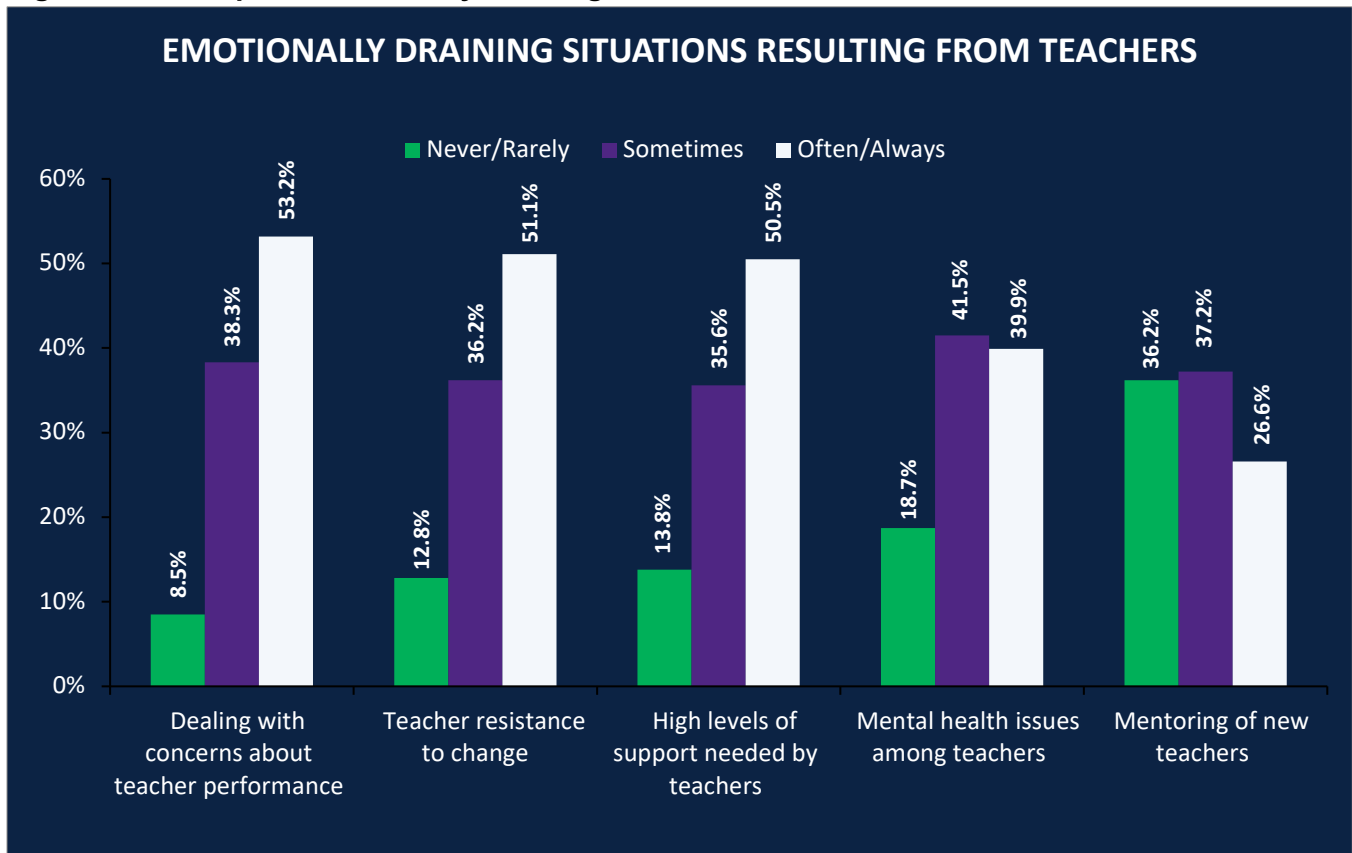


Figure 15 (above) suggests that interactions with students such as mental health issues (66.9%), student discipline (62.3%), and cyber-bullying (22.9%) *often* or *always* lead principals to emotionally draining situations. The results show that students' mental health and discipline are two major concerns for school principals. Approximately 38.8% of respondents indicated that cyberbullying among students *never* or *rarely* leads them to emotionally draining situations. Some issues with teachers can also lead to emotionally draining situations for school principals. Figure 16 on the following page demonstrates that the top three issues that *often* or *always* lead principals to emotionally draining situations include dealing with concerns about teacher performance (53.2%), teacher resistance to change (51.1%), and teachers needing high levels of support (50.5%). Of the participating principals, 36.2% expressed that mentoring new teachers *never* or *rarely* leads them to emotionally draining situations.

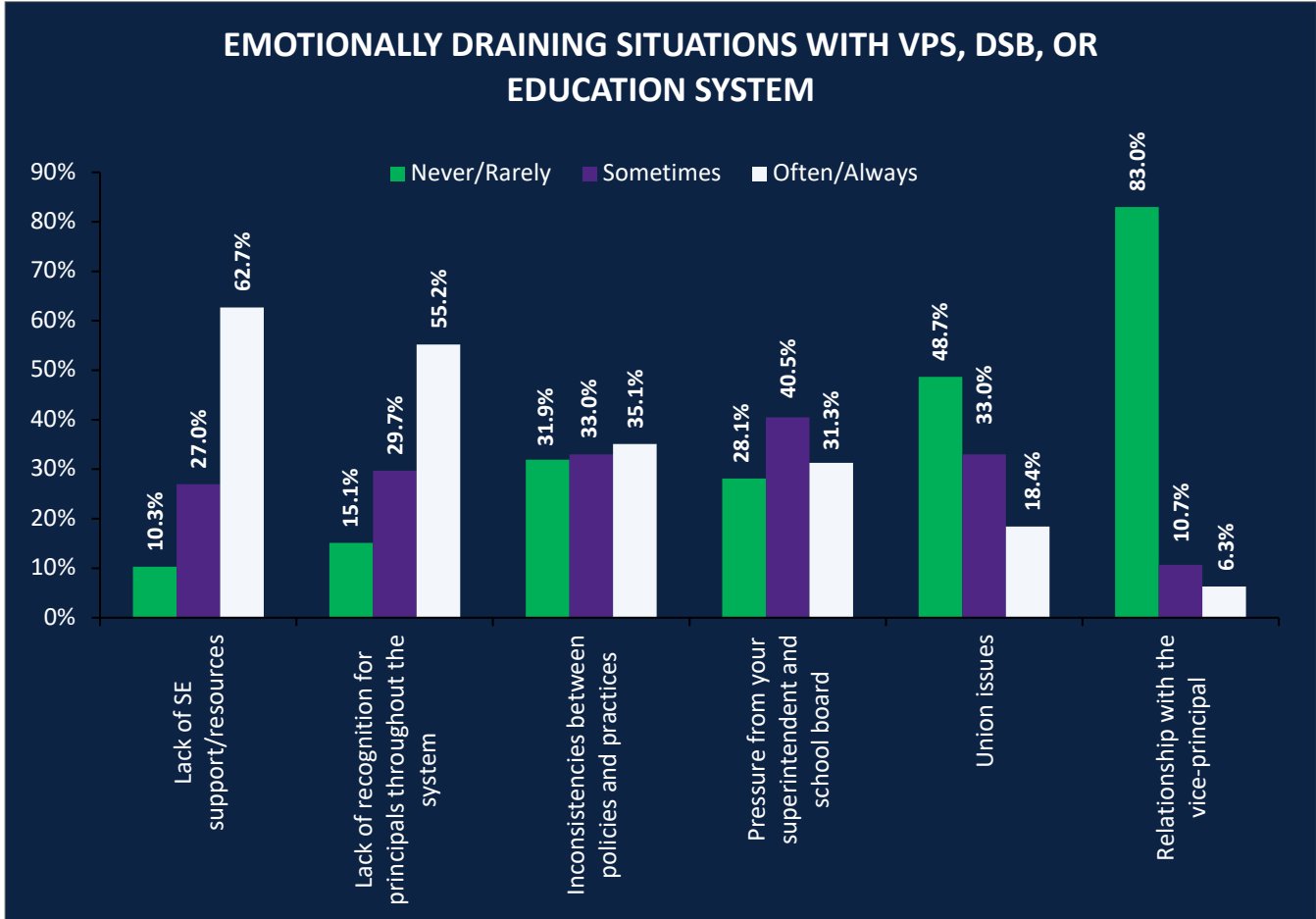
Figure 16. Principals' Emotionally Draining Situations: Teachers



The top three issues concerning vice-principals, the school board, or education system (Figure 17) that *often* or *always* lead principals to emotionally draining situations are: lack of special education support/resources (62.7%), lack of recognition for principals throughout the system (55.2%), and inconsistencies between policies and practices (35.1%). Principals pointed out that relationships with vice-principals (83%) *never* or *rarely* lead them to emotionally draining situations.

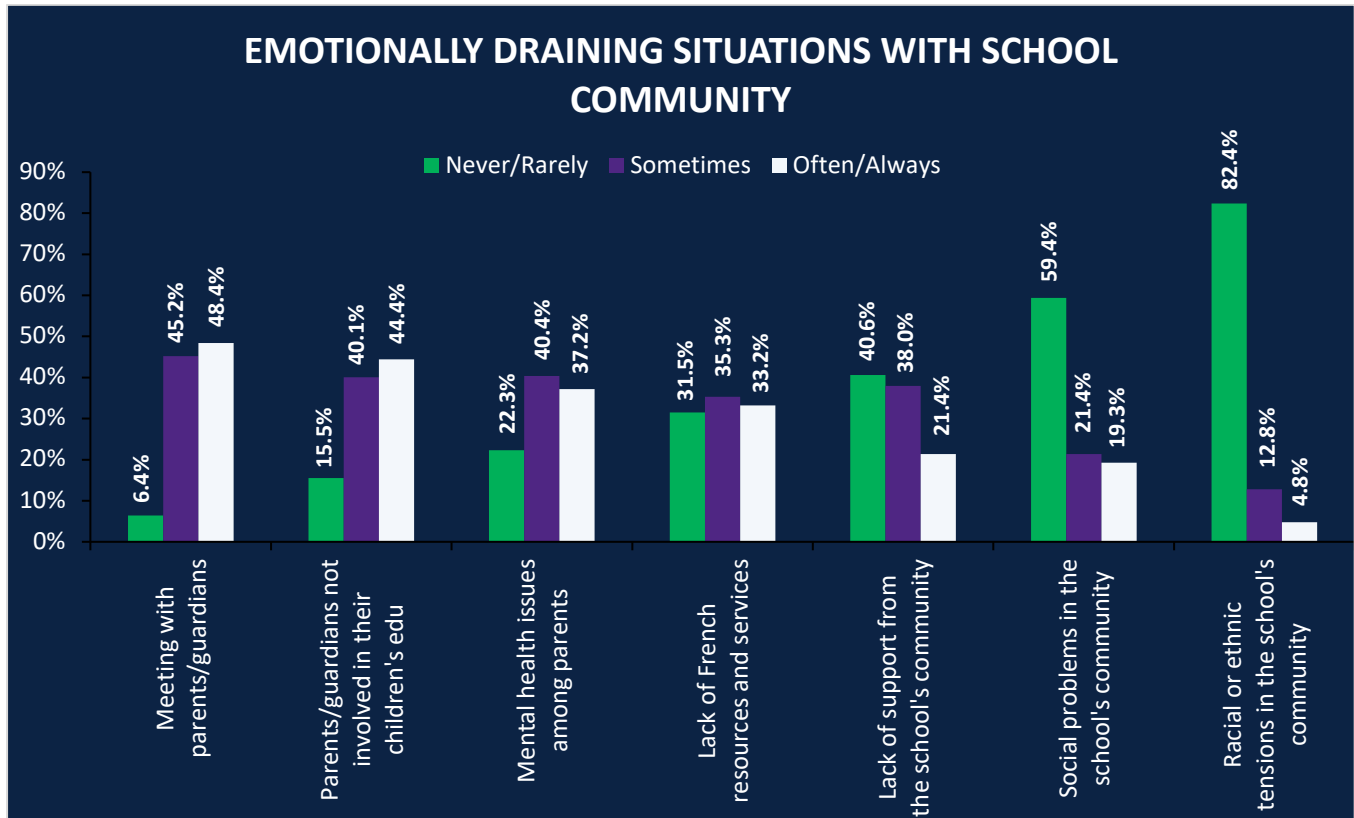


**Figure 17. Principals’ Emotionally Draining Situations: Vice-Principals, School Board, or Education System**



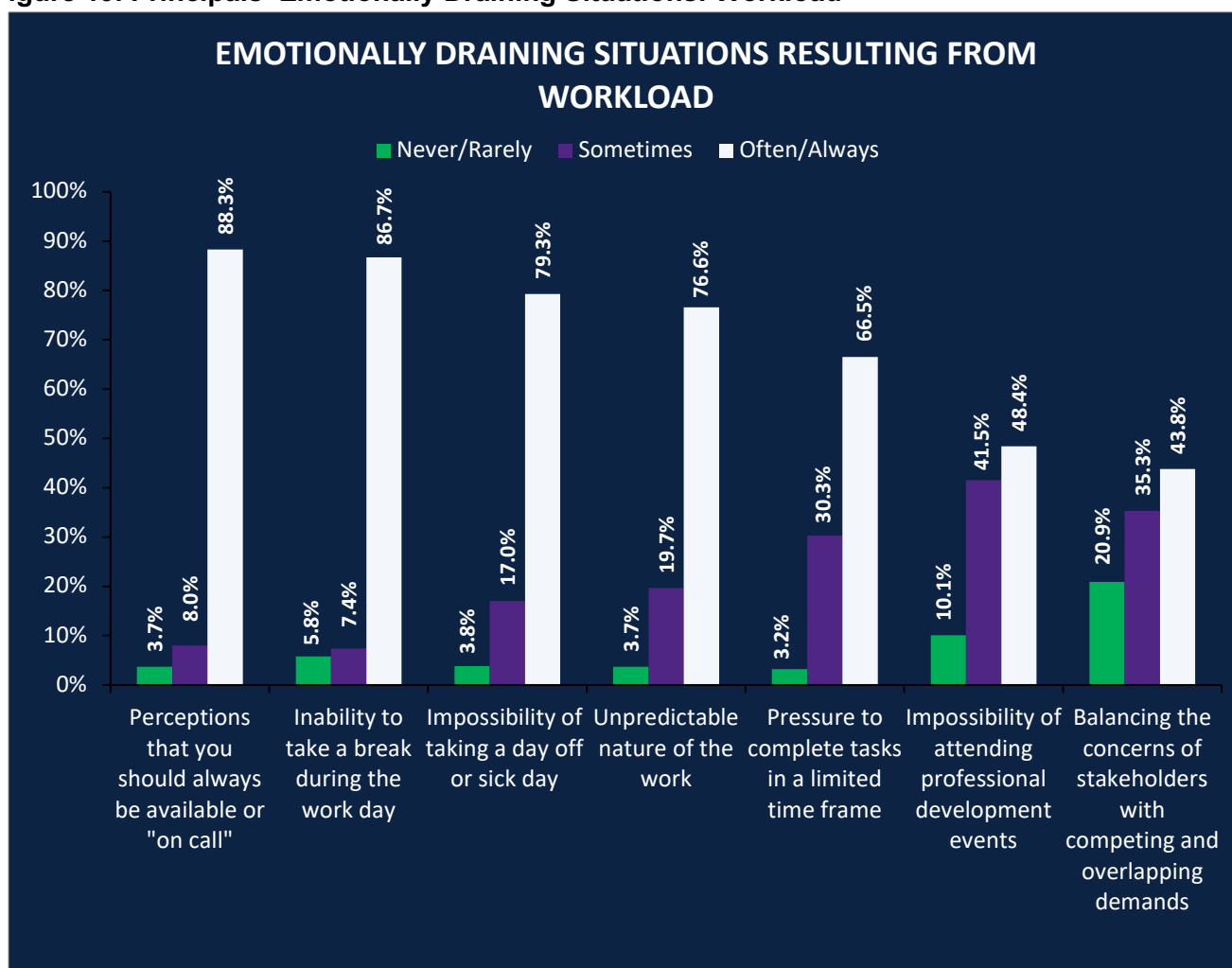
Schools are part of larger communities, which means that principals also navigate challenges associated with the communities in which they work. As displayed in Figure 18 below, 82.4% of the principals indicated *never/rarely* experiencing emotionally draining situations arising from racial or ethnic tensions within the school community, and 59.4% *never* or *rarely* felt that the social problems in their school’s community were challenging. However, there were some challenges principals indicated facing with their school community. For example, 48.4% of the principals in this study *often* or *always* found that meeting with parents and guardians posed emotionally draining situations. Further, 44.4% of the sample cited parents/guardians not being involved in their child(ren)’s education as *often* or *always* being emotionally challenging.

Figure 18. Emotionally Draining Situations with School Community



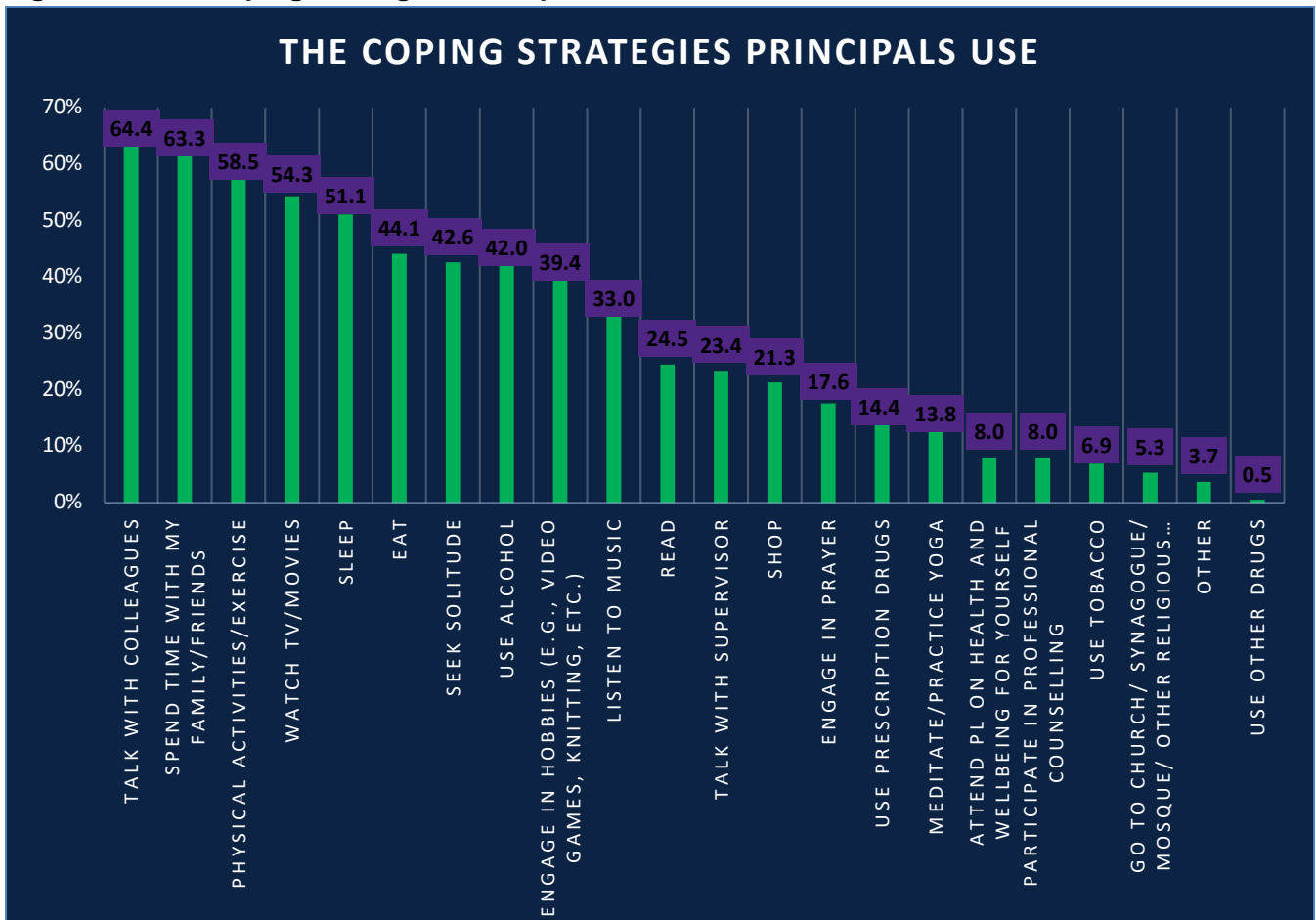
Workload is one of the biggest factors that can result in emotionally draining situations for school principals. Figure 19 on the following page reveals that principals *often* or *always* experience emotionally draining situations that stem from their workload: perceptions that principals should always be available or “on call” (88.3%), inability to take a break during the work day (86.7%), impossibility of taking a day off or sick day (79.3%), the unpredictable nature of the work (76.6%), pressure to complete tasks in a limited time frame (66.5%), impossibility of attending professional learning events (48.4%), and balancing the concerns of stakeholders with competing and overlapping demands (43.8%).

**Figure 19. Principals' Emotionally Draining Situations: Workload**



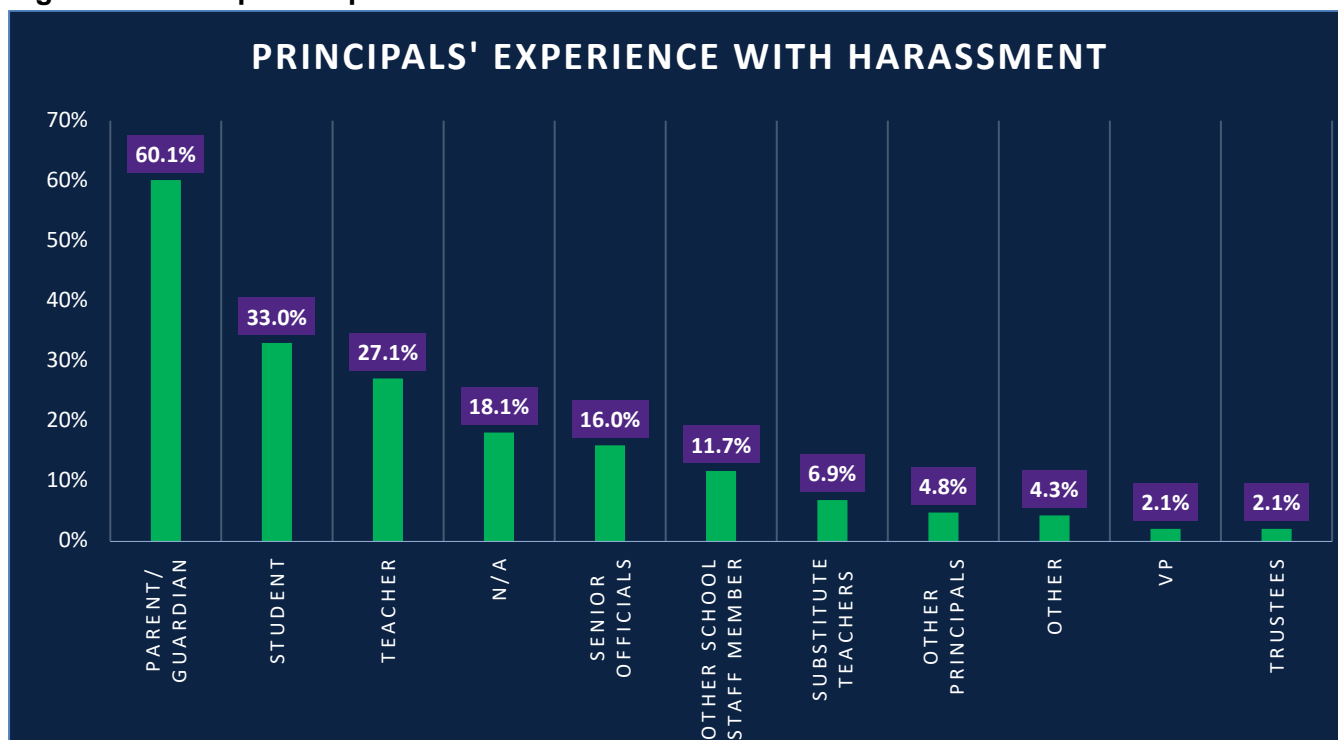
On the following page, Figure 20 displays the various coping strategies that principals reported using to cope with emotionally draining days. The most common coping strategies included: talking with colleagues (64.4%), spending time with family and friends (63.3%), engaging in physical activities or exercise (58.3%), watching television/movies (54.3%), and sleeping (51.1%). Other popular coping strategies included: eating (44.1%), seeking solitude (42.6%), and using alcohol (42.0%).

Figure 20. The Coping Strategies Principals Use



The survey results also revealed a worrying aspect of school principals' reality at work. The following figures demonstrate that school principals are subject to a range of abuses, including harassment and physical assault. Principals reported that they have been harassed by various stakeholders in the past two years, including parents/guardians, students, teachers, senior officials, other school staff members, substitute teachers, other principals, vice-principals, and trustees.

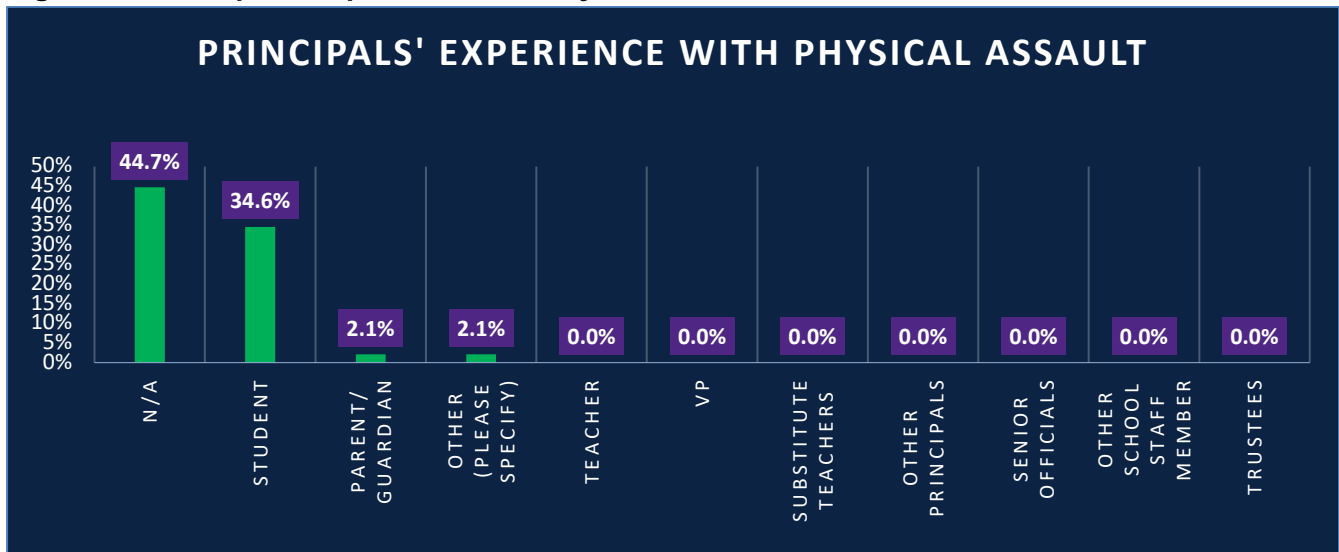
**Figure 21. Principals' Experience with Harassment**



The survey question about their experiences with harassment was multiple choice and as such the percentages do not add up to 100: participants could choose more than one option. Although parents have a legitimate right to express their concerns about their children’s education within appropriate channels, this right can be exercised to the point of harassment on some occasions. Figure 21 above shows that 60.1% of the participating principals were harassed by parents/guardians in the past two years. Next to parents/guardians, principals were harassed by students (33.0%), teachers (27.1%), senior officials (16.0%), other school staff members (11.7%), substitute teachers (6.9%), other principals (4.8%), vice-principals (2.1%), and trustees (2.1%). Only 18.1% of principals selected *not applicable*.

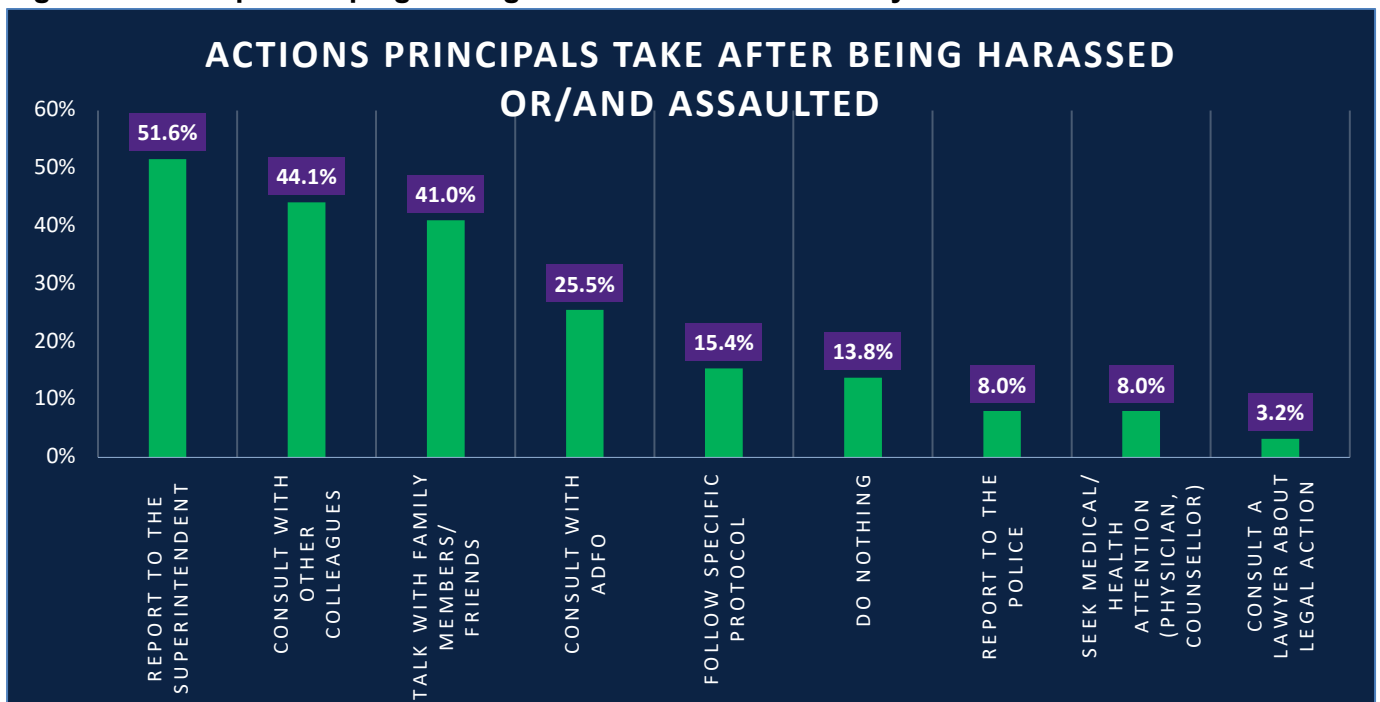
Participating principals also reported experiencing physical assault—a finding that is both unexpected and deeply worrisome. Figure 22 (next page) reveals that the physical assault principals have experienced in the past two years is mainly from three sources: students (34.6%), parents (2.1%), and other stakeholders (2.1%) that include custodians and special education students. Approximately 44.7% of the principals responded that physical assault is *not applicable*.

**Figure 22. Principals' Experience with Physical Assault**



Principals are taking various actions and using various coping strategies to deal with harassment and physical assault. As demonstrated in Figure 23 below, the most common actions principals reported using included: report to the superintendent (51.6%), consult with other colleagues (44.1%), talk with family members/friends (41%), consult with ADFO (25.5%), follow specific protocol (15.4%), do nothing (13.8%), report to the police (8.0%), seek medical/health attention (8.0%), and consult a lawyer about legal action (3.2%).

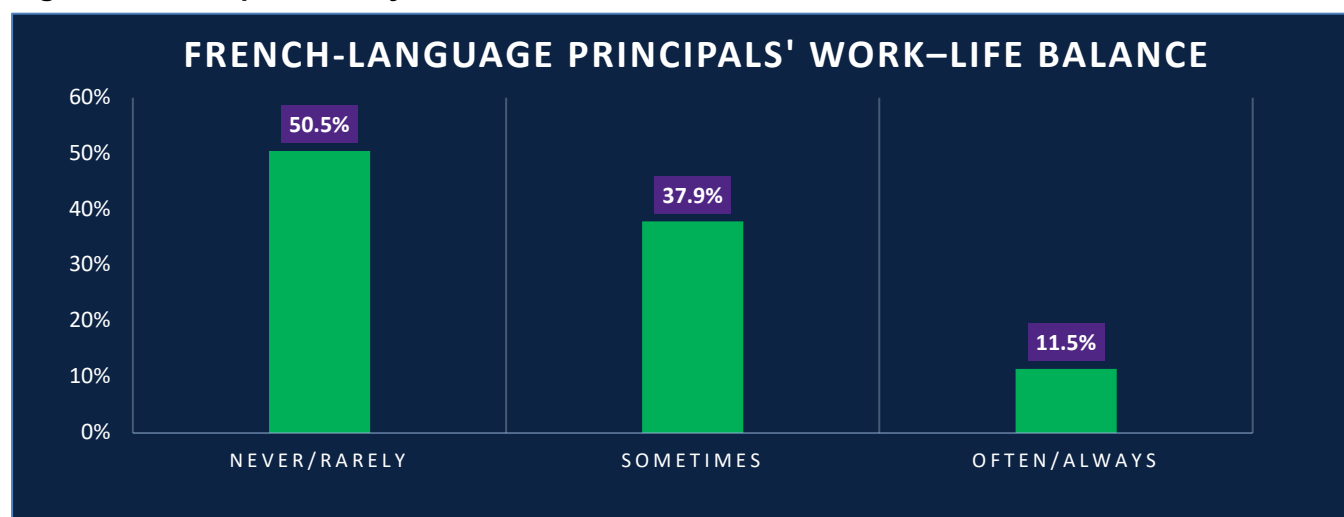
**Figure 23. Principals' Coping Strategies for Harassment and Physical Assault**



## Theme 6: Work and Life Balance

Achieving balance between their work and personal life can be a difficult undertaking for many principals. For example, only 2.2% of principals reported having work–life balance *all the time*. Figure 24 (below) also shows that an additional 11.5% of principals in this study indicated that they *often* or *always* achieve an appropriate balance between their work and personal life. However, 37.9% of the sample reported only *sometimes* being able to balance work and their other responsibilities to achieve work–life balance. A total of 31.3% of the sample *rarely* and 19.2% *never* felt that they could balance work and responsibilities in their personal life. This finding indicates that approximately 88.4% of the principal population could be suffering from a lack of work–life balance at any time during the school year.

Figure 24. Principals' Ability to Balance Their Work and Personal Life



This section of the survey also asked current principals to provide advice to aspiring and currently practicing principals about work–life balance. One-hundred and twenty-seven principals provided feedback. Three key themes—a support network consisting of any combination of family, friends, and colleagues; engaging in hobbies and activities outside of school; and going to the gym—emerged from these responses. The top three strategies they mentioned were personal and individual. For example, one participant stated that “the only moment that allows me to forget about work is when I do activities with my family.”

## Theme 7: Supports for Principals

The French-language principals who participated in this survey named several supports they currently use, while others indicated supports that they would like to see put in place for them. Although the principals who responded to this open-ended question named supports, they did not necessarily go into detail about how these supports might be applied. The suggested supports were predominantly associated with personnel both within and outside the school. The top four categories were: (a) additional paraprofessionals and vice-principals within the school setting, (b) increased support from superintendents, (c) professional support networks, and (d) mentoring and professional learning in different areas of management.

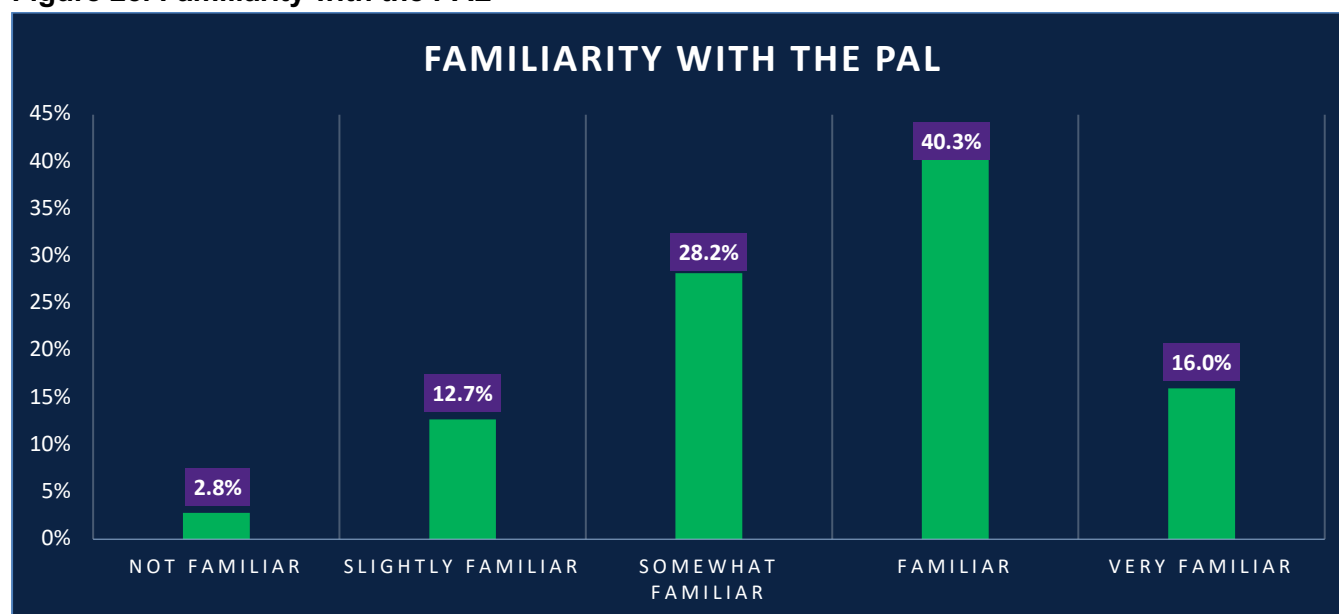


## Theme 8: The Politique D'Aménagement Linguistique (PAL)

Ontario's Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL) sets out the Ministry's guidelines for promoting French language use in the eight French-language Catholic district school boards and the four French-language public district school boards (PAL, 2005). The policy is intended to foster the well-being of current and future generations by helping optimize the transmission of the French language and culture to and among young people and breathing new life into the francophone community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). School principals play a critical role in implementing the PAL to meet their students' linguistic, educational, and cultural needs.

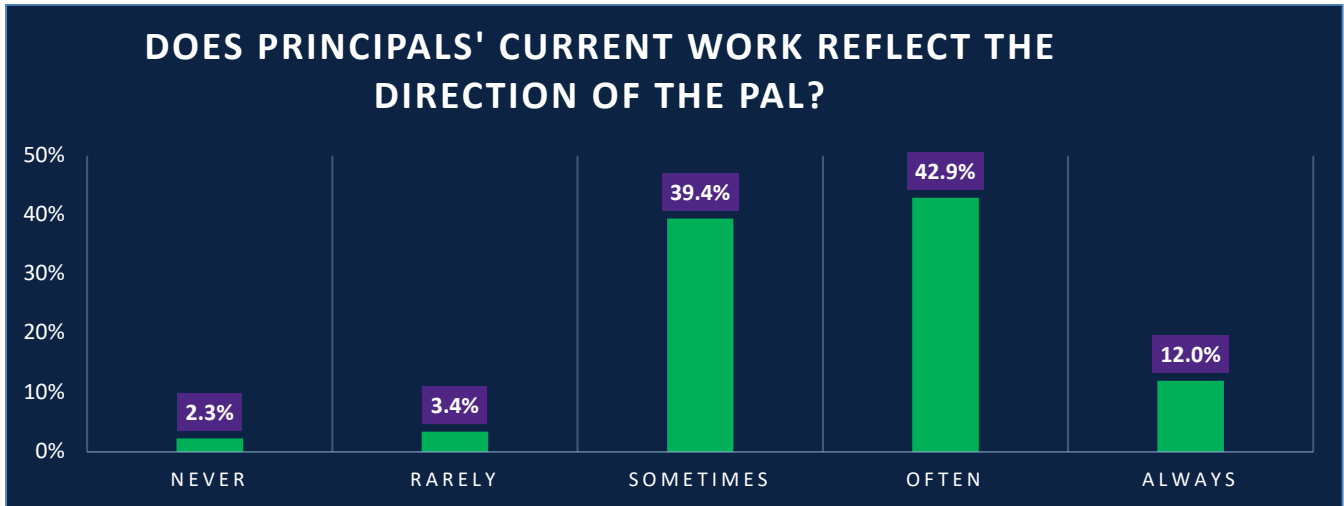
As demonstrated in Figure 25 below, approximately 56.3% of principals indicated they are *familiar* (40.3%) or *very familiar* (16%) with the PAL policy, and 15.5% of them were *unfamiliar* (2.8%) or *slightly familiar* (12.7%) with the policy. A follow-up survey question asked if principals' current work reflects the direction of the PAL.

Figure 25. Familiarity with the PAL



As Figure 26 (next page) shows, 54.9% of the respondents reported that their current work as a principal *often* (42.9%) or *always* (12.0%) reflects the direction of the PAL, and 5.7% reported their work *never* (2.3%) or *rarely* (3.4%) reflects the PAL.

**Figure 26. Whether or Not Principals' Work Reflects the PAL**



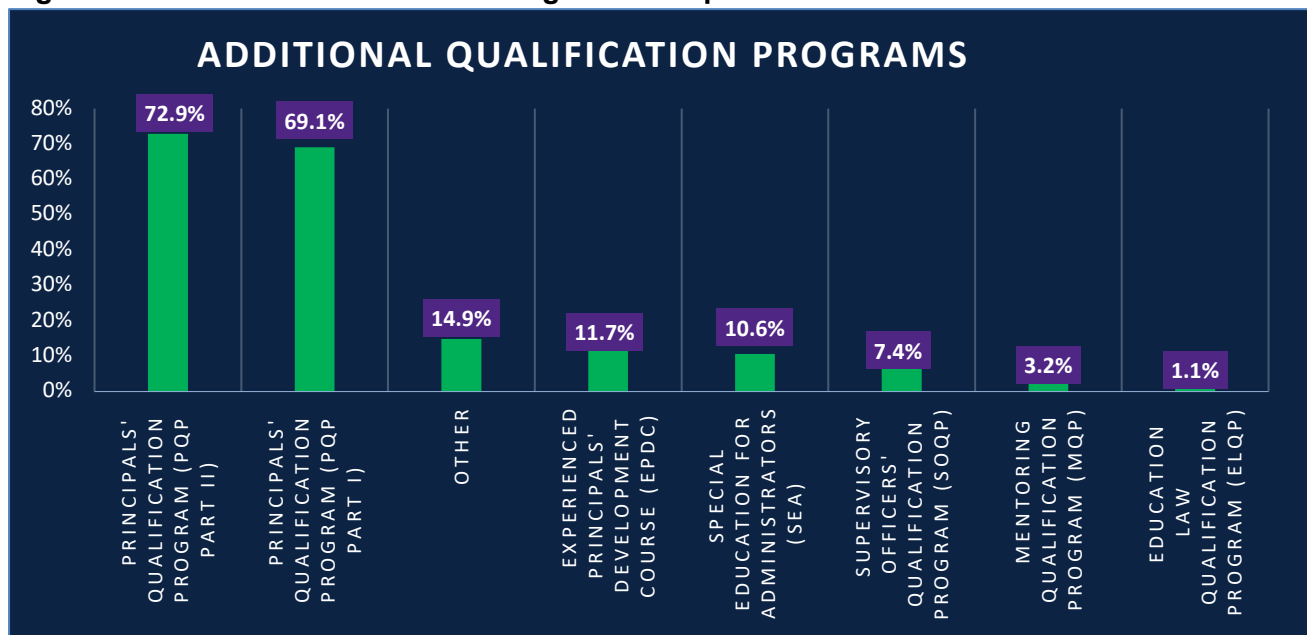
The PAL is at the centre of French-language principals' work: it constitutes the framework for their work and helps them plan activities that develop cultural identity and promote the French language, which is the *raison d'être* of French-language schools. Principals apply the PAL every day and use it to create and assess their School Improvement Plan, and to guide their decisions regarding recruitment and retention. Although the PAL is an essential tool used to promote French language and culture, principals underlined that it creates additional tasks that English-language schools do not have and as a result they don't always have the time or the resources to implement it. Some principals mentioned that staff don't have enough knowledge or skills to apply the PAL. Several principals noted they do not apply it because the needs of their clients have changed (e.g., people who consider French as a tool and not a way of life), and the PAL should be updated to reflect these changes. The PAL can also pressure some principals to recruit and retain students.

## Theme 9: Professional Learning and Mentoring

The survey asked the participating principals to rank the top three skills they had to develop and refine over the past two years to better perform the duties, tasks, and practices involved in their daily work. They ranked the following top three skills: new skills to create a collectively efficient environment among school staff (20.1%), stress management (14.0%), and technology skills (11.2%).

Below, Figure 27 demonstrates that the participating principals have completed a wide range of professional learning programs and activities, including the Principals' Qualification Program II (PQP II) (72.9%), Principals' Qualification Program I (PQP I) (69.1%), and other professional learning (14.9%), which includes special educational training, conflict management, risk assessment and management, coaching, religious teaching, and so forth, according to their responses to the open-ended questions. Some principals indicated that they have registered for PQP I and PQP II but cancelled due to lack of time. The participating principals have also completed additional professional learning courses, such as Experienced Principals' Development Course (EPDC) (11.7%), Special Education for Administrators (SEA) (10.6%), Supervisory Officers' Qualification Program (SOQP) (7.4%), Mentoring Qualification Program (MQP) (3.2%), and Education Law Qualification Program (ELQP) (1.1%).

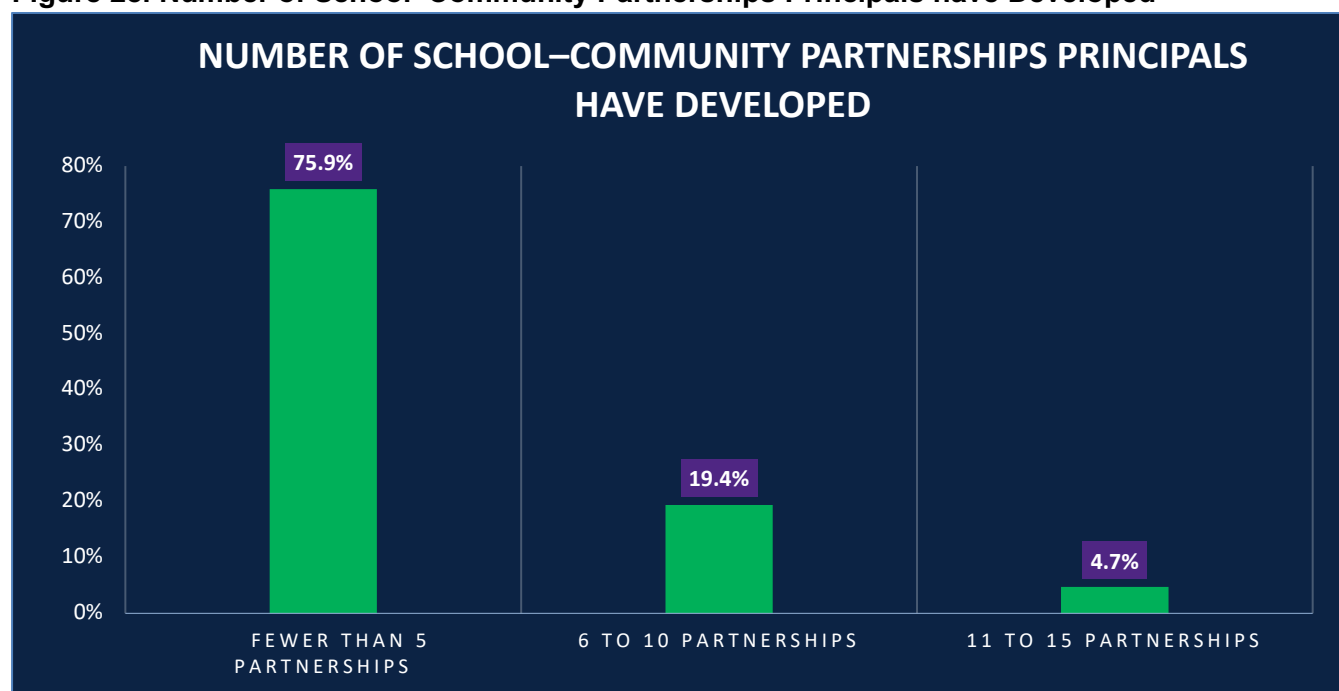
**Figure 27. Additional Qualification Programs Completed**



## Theme 10: Partnerships

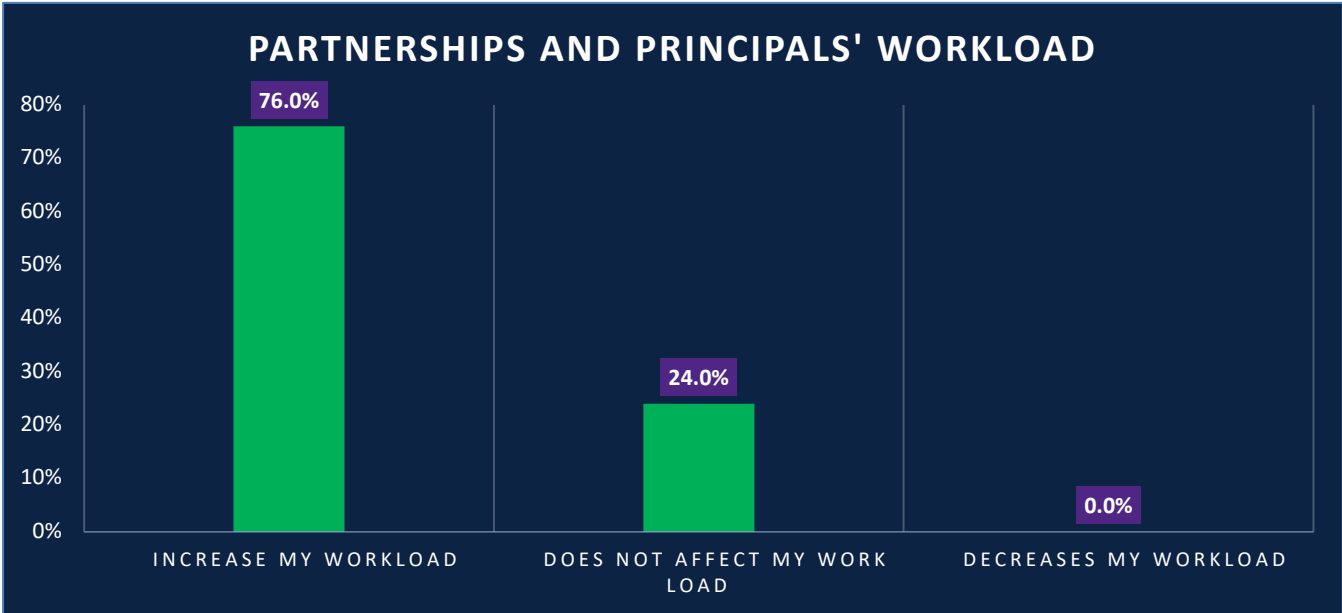
As part of their role, French-language principals in Ontario develop and maintain partnerships between their school and community groups and/or agencies in the surrounding community. Principals in this study indicated that they are involved in an average of five partnerships across the sample. The number of school community partnerships at the principals' respective schools ranged from zero to 15. As displayed in Figure 28 below, 75.9% of participating principals are involved in fewer than five partnerships between their school and community groups or agencies. A total of 19.4% of principals in this study reported participating in six to 10 partnerships, while 4.7% of the sample reported engaging in 11 to 15 partnerships.

**Figure 28. Number of School–Community Partnerships Principals have Developed**



The survey also asked principals to indicate how their involvement with school–community partnerships influenced their workload. Of those principals that responded, none indicated that these partnerships decreased their workload. As demonstrated in Figure 29 on the following page, three-quarters of the sample (76%) indicated that these partnerships actually increased their workload, while only one quarter (24%) indicated that it has no effect on their workload.

Figure 29. How Partnerships Affect Principals' Workload



## Section 4: Recommendations

These recommendations are directed toward those who influence and support the French-language principals in our systems: school boards, senior administration, professional principals' associations, the Ministry of Education, teacher federations, community stakeholders, and school communities. Survey respondents generously dedicated time to provide information and responses that have allowed us to confidently make recommendations to the education community that can support French-language principals, both current and aspiring. It should be noted that some of these recommendations reiterate the recommendations we provided in the 2013 Ontario Principals' Council Report on principals' work and the 2017 Ontario Principals' Council report on vice-principals. This is due to the overlap in the research findings, but many recommendations are unique and specific to the French Public and French Catholic contexts.

## **Recommendation: Reduce Isolation for Principals**

Our analysis indicates that French-language principals' work is very isolating. The principals described having very limited supports outside the school. Our findings indicate that it is rare for principals to access significant supports from any one organization. Respondents reiterated that their main support was their family, friends, and colleagues. Participants provided examples of supports that they believe will help them with their role and could help to reduce the isolation they feel. We recommend the ADFO, ideally in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, use this feedback to explore structures that could be put in place to reduce the amount of isolation principals experience.

## **Recommendation: Continue to Provide Effective Professional Learning that is Aligned with Principals' Work**

Much of the qualitative responses throughout the survey pointed to two main areas of continued professional learning that principals would like to see developed. These two areas were (a) professional learning around health and well-being for principals themselves, their staff, and their students, and (b) professional learning around finance, budgeting, and human resources. Participants also indicated in the open-ended responses that they want continued professional support around the Aménagement Linguistique Policy (PAL).

## **Recommendation: Promote Healthy and Safe Work Environments**

Although 79.2% of the surveyed principals were mostly satisfied with their work, a nearly equal number (80.3%) reported that their work *often* or *always* puts them in emotionally draining situations. These emotionally draining situations are often the product of in-depth interactions with students, parents, and teachers. Some of these emotionally draining situations come from being harassed or physically assaulted. Of the participants, 60.1% indicated that they were harassed by a parent in the past two years, and another 34.6% indicated that they have been physically assaulted by a student in the past year. We recommend that the education sector work more intentionally to promote healthy and safe work environments for principals.

## **Recommendation: Change the Organizational Culture**

The survey findings suggest that French-language principals are extremely dedicated. Most respondents indicated they were satisfied with their decision to become a principal despite working long hours, feeling less respected by teacher unions, and feeling like they do not have enough time to complete their work. The findings strongly indicated that principals' workload leaves little opportunity for them to engage in healthy behaviours, such as using sick days when necessary, regularly eating lunch, or taking time away from the school to engage in professional learning. The education community and ADFO could work with their members, as well as aspiring principals, to change the culture surrounding principals—starting with principals' own expectations around their work and role in their schools. The ADFO could begin by encouraging principals to engage in these work entitlements and practices. This change in culture should also involve stakeholders—such as parents and district school boards—to address their expectations regarding the role of school principals.



## **Recommendation: Commit to a Diverse Workforce**

Our data analysis indicates that improvement in principal diversity is needed, as the current principal population is 90.4% Caucasian. We recommend that the education community actively support and mentor aspiring principals from visibly minoritized groups to pursue official school leadership positions, especially from Black and/or First Nation, Métis, or Inuit (FNMI) communities; in our data, these groups only represented 3.2% and 4.8%, respectively.

## **Recommendation: Principal Mentoring**

With 45.7% of the sample having less than five years of experience as a principal, we strongly recommend that the education community consider mentoring initiatives in which experienced and, most importantly, effective principals mentor new principals to help them succeed in the position. This includes formal and informal mentoring that connects early career principals with more experienced senior principals in a range of mentoring relationships to better support the younger workforce—57.7% of whom are between the ages of 40 and 49.

## Recommendation: Further Research

The response rate from principals indicates that ADFO members are interested in and concerned about this line of research. We strongly recommend that the ADFO and the rest of the education community continue this research agenda by supporting further research that explores how health and well-being concerns, brought on by contemporary work environments, influence principals' leadership practices. French-language principals also play an important role in francophone linguistic and cultural sustainability and development; this role is not well recognized, and further research should explore how it influences their work and well-being. Further research is also needed to explore the invisible aspects of principals' daily labour, emotional labour in particular.

## Recommendation: Build Research Partnerships

We recommend that ADFO continues to build partnerships and networks with research organizations, such as universities, to provide members with timely information based on research evidence. These efforts will continue to bridge the knowledge–practice gap and help build capacity within the principal workforce.

## Recommendation: Advocacy

The ADFO increasingly advocates for principals' interests with the Ontario provincial government and local district school boards. Recommendations included here support much of the ongoing advocacy work of the ADFO.

**Advocate for more qualified substitute teachers.** Principals reported *often* (29.8%) and *always* (58.5%) having difficulty finding qualified substitute teachers, which means that teacher absenteeism is a concern. We recommend that the ADFO work with the Ontario College of Teachers and initial teacher education programs to increase the number of qualified French-language teachers to ensure there is a skilled teacher pool from which to draw.

**Advocate for district-based professional learning.** We recommend that the ADFO continues to work with school districts to provide professional learning for aspiring and practicing principals, specifically to address many of the concerns highlighted in the survey findings.

**Enhance the existing Principals' Qualification Program (PQP).** Principals in this study clearly indicated that there were specific work concentrations unique to the principal role, and that they wished to have access to dedicated professional learning opportunities specific to their role. We recommend that the ADFO builds upon and enhances the existing PQP and other professional learning to respond to some of the specific work tasks and challenges that principals face daily, especially in the areas of special education leadership, conflict and crisis management, risk assessment and management, and coaching.

**Advocate for reduced workloads and a redefined role for principals.** Our analysis of the data confirms that French-language principals' work is intensifying not only because of the changing nature of their work, but also because principals' work is being downloaded from the district school board onto them. We recommend the Ministry of Education and district school boards, where possible, reassign some of principals' administrative and managerial tasks to school administrative staff to ensure principals can dedicate more time to instructional leadership. We also recommend that the ADFO promote a redefinition of the school principal role in the *Education Act*.

**Develop productive working relationships with teachers and teacher unions.** The participating principals indicated that many of their interactions with teachers result in emotionally draining situations. Much of this stress comes from dealing with teacher performance, well-being, and in some cases, resistance. We recommend that the ADFO continues to advocate for and work toward creating healthy and productive relationships between principals and teachers, as well as teacher unions. This may also mean advocating at the provincial level for changes in workplace relationships.

## Conclusion

Our study examined the changing nature of principals' work in French Public and French Catholic Ontario schools. Using data from an online survey, we have presented a more comprehensive picture of French-language principals' work by determining the types of duties, activities, and practices they engage in on a daily basis, as well as the challenges and possibilities they face in their current work. Survey data from 78 questions that covered 12 aspects of French-language principals' work were subject to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

In summary, our data analysis indicates that, even though principals reported high job satisfaction, there is an urgent need for structural change both in terms of creating a safe work environment and promoting a highly qualified teacher workforce. French-language principals are also experiencing work intensification in the sense that they are working within a public education system that appears to have limited resources (e.g., qualified teachers), little time to complete their work and engage in professional learning opportunities, and increased demands and expectations from the Ministry of Education, district school boards, and parent communities.

If French-language principals are to be assisted in their current work, if school systems are to attract and retain the best candidates, and if universities and other training institutions are to adequately prepare prospective principals for a challenging job, then the Ministry of Education, district school boards, and professional associations need to better understand and support their work. The recommendations we have posed for education stakeholders and aspiring and practicing French-language principals are intended to ensure that principals (aspiring and current) receive the supports they need to flourish in the role.

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