Ontario Principal Barometer: School Principals' Work, Well-Being, and Workplace Safety

2026 Survey Report

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The Principal Barometer Canada

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Effective school leaders are key to a thriving education system. When they can do their job well, they create a productive and positive school climate and skillfully manage resources. This report summarizes the results for the Ontario principals who participated in the 2026 Canadian Principal Barometer survey. The Principal Barometer survey is a tool used to investigate the occupational health, working conditions, and well-being of school principals. The Ontario analytic sample included 602 respondents, all of whom were employed as a school principal in an English-language publicly funded school in Ontario. The survey was administered through a Western University Qualtrics link from February to early March 2026.

ON Participant Profile at a Glance

- **602** respondents
- **65.2%** identified as women
- **7.7 years** average experience
- **67.0%** were age 45-54
- **50.3%** held a master's degree
- **74.4%** elementary-only principals
- **17.4%** reported a disability

Selected characteristics are shown here; full distributions are presented in later figures.

As shown in the Participant Profile above, respondents reported an average of 7.70 years of experience as principals. Most held a master's degree and identified as a woman. We also asked participants about their ethno-racial identity. The vast majority of participants identified as White (87.5%), followed by South Asian (3.9%) and Black (3.0%).

The strongest finding is that Ontario principals described their work as fast-paced, cognitively demanding, and emotionally intense. At the same time, principals continued to report high meaning and commitment. Most felt their work was important and that their school was of great importance to them. However, this high meaning coexisted with signs of strain. Principals reported high burnout and stress, and their self-rated health is worse than average Canadian workers (Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers [OHCOW], 2023). Occupational health and safety risks were substantial. During the previous 12 months, many reported threats of violence, direct physical violence, workplace quarrels or conflicts, and gossip and slander. Among those reporting physical violence, students were the most frequently identified source; among those reporting threats of violence, students and parents/guardians were prominent sources. Equity-related findings require careful reporting because of sample size, but the descriptive results indicated that one quarter of respondents reported workplace discrimination in the previous 12 months.

Based on our findings, we recommend that:

- School boards and professional associations conduct workload reviews to examine workload intensity and work distribution;
- School boards improve internal communication processes;
- School boards and the Ministry of Education improve role clarity through coordination across the system;
- School board leaders (i.e., superintendents) engage in explicit recognition and appreciation for work well done;
- The Ministry of Education along with the English school boards, monitor mental health and engage in early intervention to prevent burnout;
- Professional associations support principals in improving their sleep and eating habits by enlisting experts to provide tailored resources and professional learning opportunities;
- The Ministry of Education, along with the English school boards, treat threats, violence, bullying, and conflict as occupational health and safety priorities;
- School boards, in collaboration with professional associations, develop support guides for principals who Have experienced violence
- Auditor General of Ontario investigate the 2024 provincial funding into Combating Violence and Improving Safety in Schools
- The Ministry of Education work with the English school boards to continue to address equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and anti-oppression issues; and
- Principals engage in boundary setting, and that English school boards support principals in boundary management.

Effective school leaders are key to a thriving education system. When they can do their job well, they create a productive and positive school climate and skillfully manage resources. In this report, we present the findings from the 2026 Ontario Principal Barometer survey. The Principal Barometer survey is a tool used to investigate the occupational health, working conditions, and well-being of school principals working in Canadian public education systems. In Ontario, school principals employed in English-language public schools completed the survey in February–March 2026. Participating principals either worked in English-language public schools or English-language public Catholic schools. Because the dataset provided for this report is descriptive, the findings should be read as a provincial snapshot rather than as causal evidence.

Organization of Report

We begin by discussing our methodology and providing a demographic breakdown of participants. Then, we present our main findings, organized into the following themes: (a) workload, pace, and emotional demands; (b) job satisfaction, control, meaning, and professional commitment; (c) school and school board communication, recognition, and support; (d) work–life integration, health, burnout, sleep, eating practices and everyday recovery; and (e) workplace safety, discrimination, and harassment. We discuss some of the overall implications of the findings before providing a set of recommendations for school boards, the Ministry of Education, professional associations, and principals.

Methodology & Participant Profile

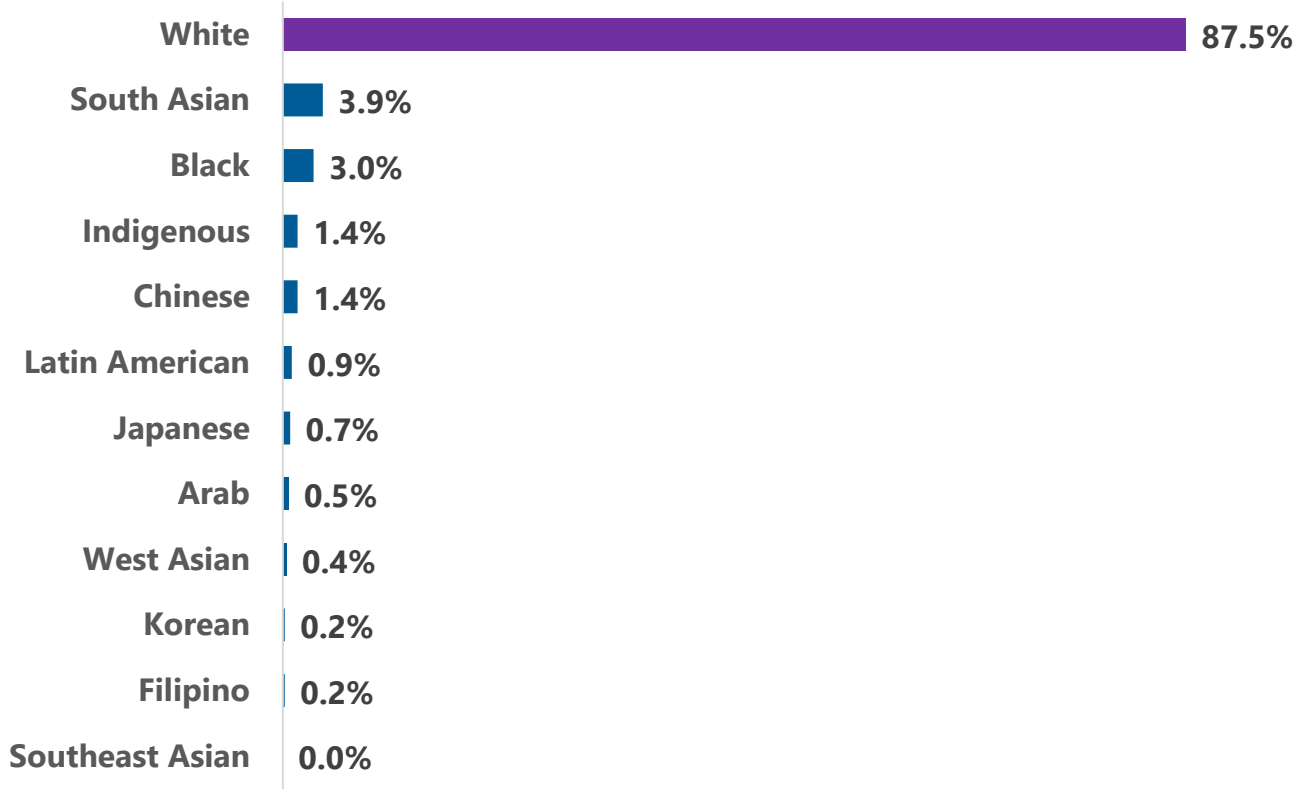
To accommodate principals' work patterns, we collected data through an online survey via Western University's Qualtrics program. An email invitation was sent to potential participants in February 2026 asking them to complete the multiple-choice survey. In addition to demographic questions, the survey contained questions from the following validated scales and screener:

- COPSOQ-III
- Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index
- Eating Habits Screener
- Bergen Burnout Inventory
- Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment

It took approximately 30 minutes for participants to complete the survey. In Ontario 2,923 invitations were sent out. Surveys that were less than 60% complete were removed, leaving 602 usable survey responses. Figures 1–7 present some demographic information about participants.

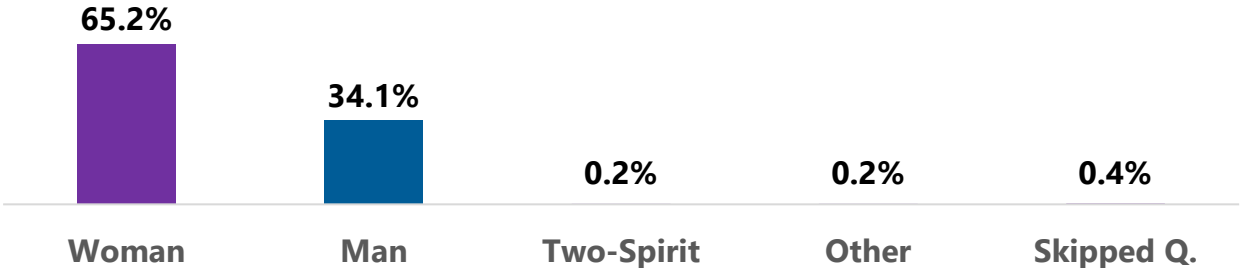
As demonstrated in Figure 1, the vast majority of participants identified as White (87.5%), followed by South Asian (3.9%) and Black (3.0%).

Figure 1. Participants' Ethno-racial Identity



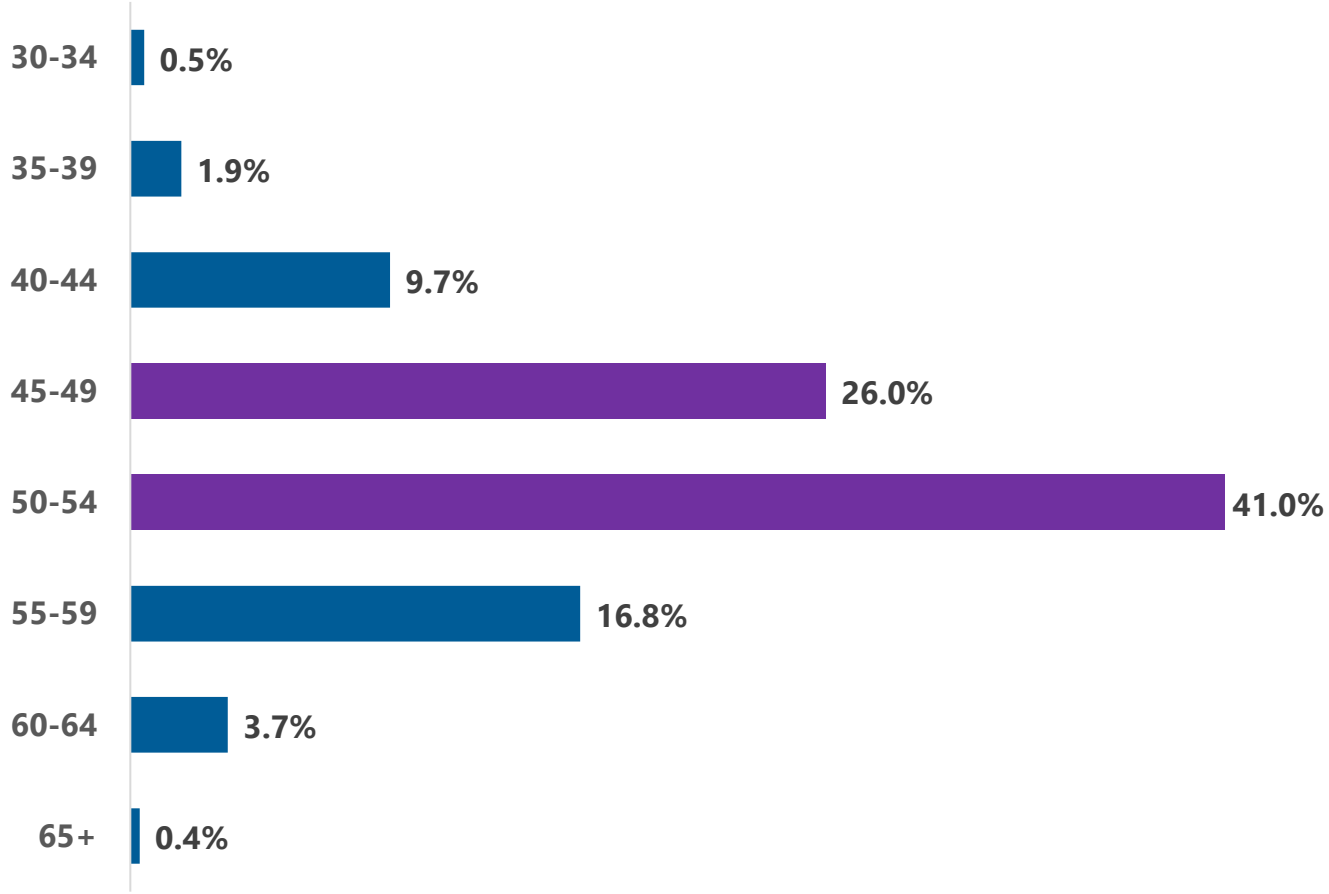
The 2026 survey provided participants with six options to indicate their gender (i.e., non-binary, man, woman, Two-Spirit, prefer not to answer, and other). As demonstrated in Figure 2, 65.2% of participants self-identified as women and 34.1% self-identified as men.

Figure 2. Participants' Gender



In terms of age, Figure 3 demonstrates that 41.0% of the participants were between 50 and 54 years old, 26.0% were between 45 and 49, and 16.8% were between 55 and 59. This means that 83.8% of the participating principals were between 45 and 59.

Figure 3. Participants' Age



Overall, 17.4% reported a disability. Figure 4 shows the type of disability among respondents who disclosed one. Participants were able to select all that applied to them.

Figure 4. Type of Disability Impacting Work that Participants Disclosed

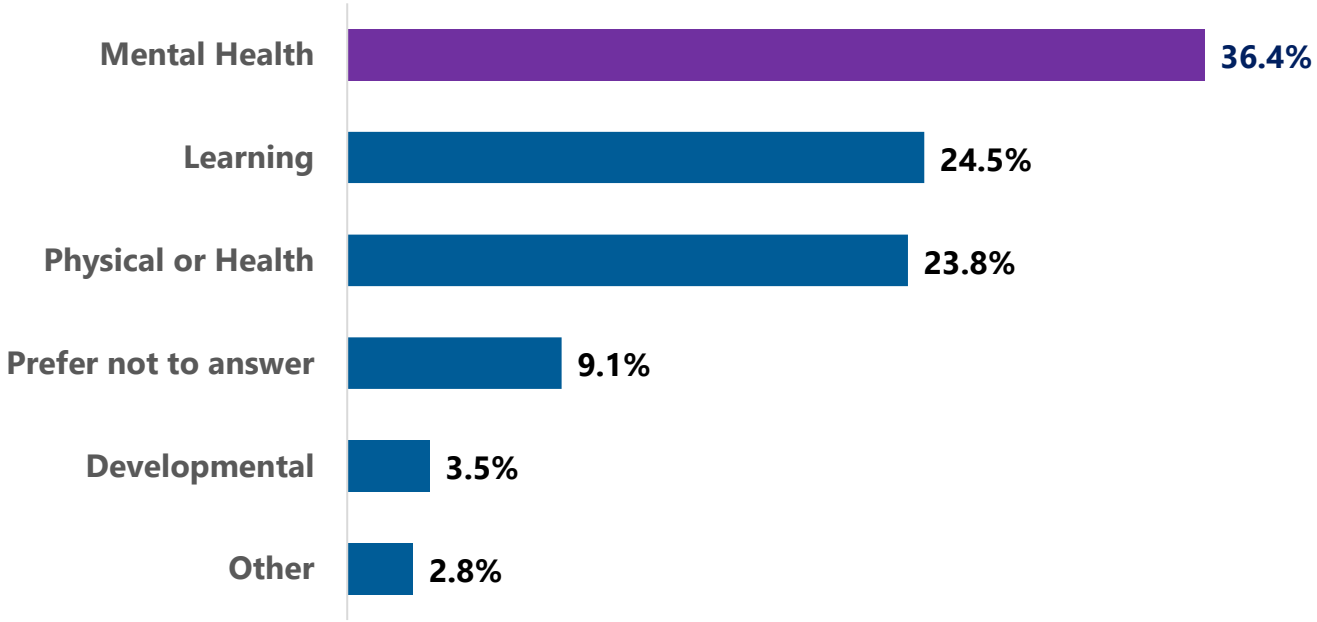


Figure 5 demonstrates how many years of experience the participants had when they completed the survey. In the sample, over a third (39.8%) of the participating principals had between 5 and 10 years of experience, and another third (33.6%) had less than 5 years in the principal role.

Figure 5. Participants' Years of Experience

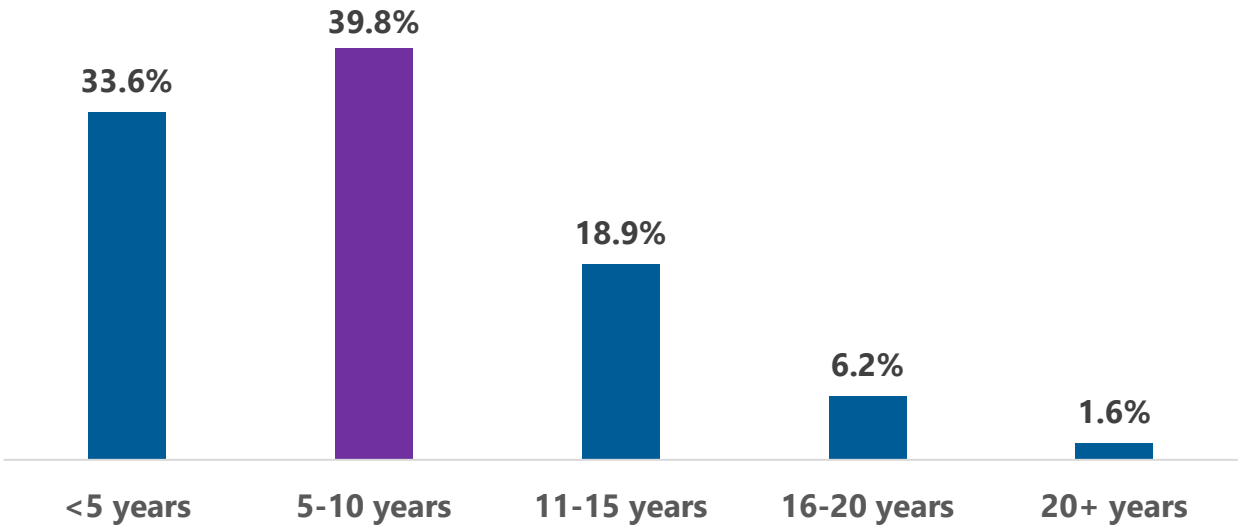
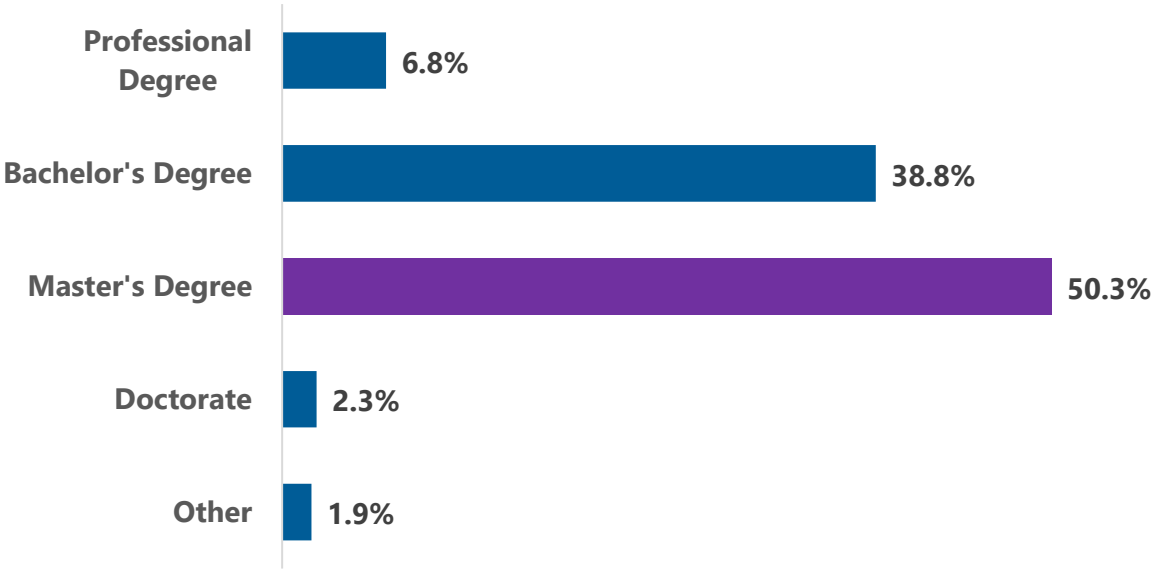


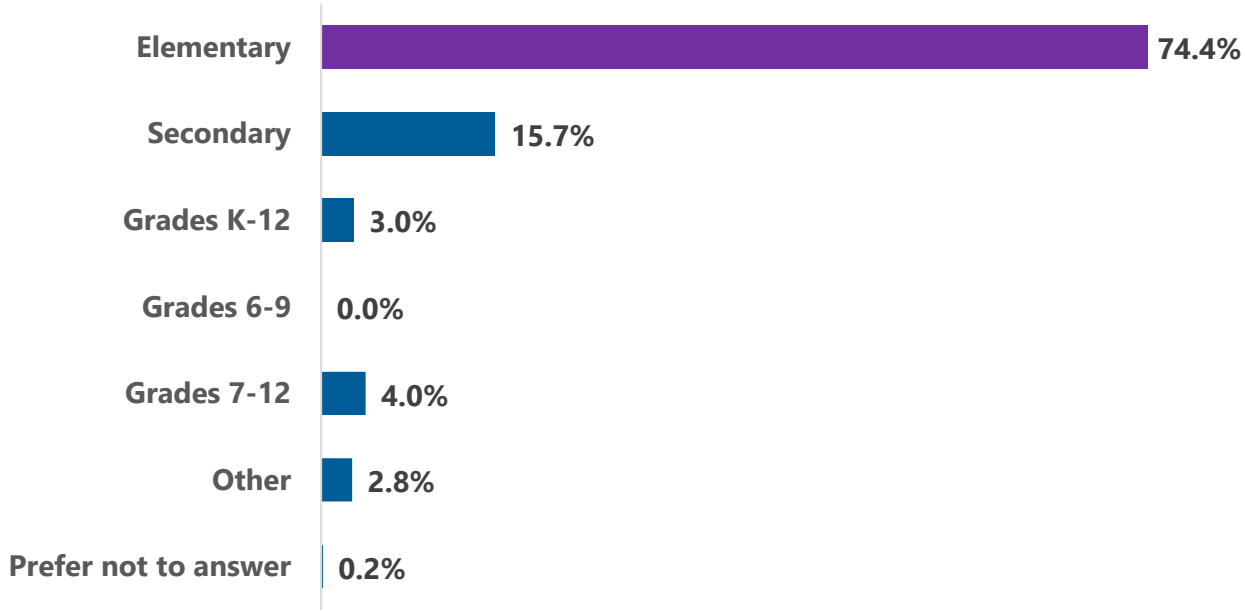
Figure 6 shows the highest level of education that participants had. Most participants held either a master's degree (50.3%) or a bachelor's degree (38.8%) as their highest level of education.

Figure 6. Participants' Highest Level of Education



According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2025), there are approximately 4,861 schools in the K–12 public education system. As shown in Figure 7, more than half of the respondents (74.4%) worked in the elementary panel.

Figure 7. Participants' School Panel



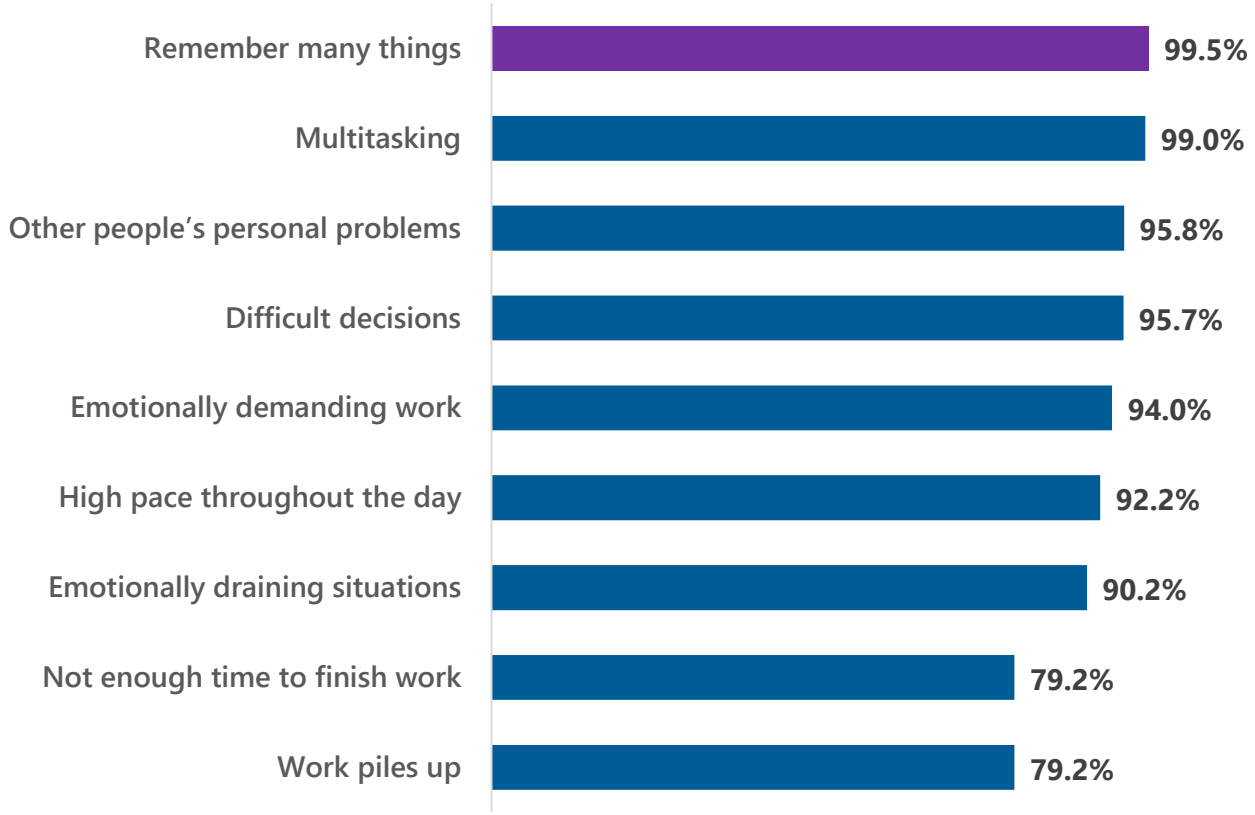
Findings

As mentioned in the introduction, we have organized the findings into the following themes: (a) workload, pace, and emotional demands; (b) job satisfaction, control, meaning, and professional commitment; (c) English school board communication, recognition, and support; (d) work–life integration, health, burnout, sleep, and eating practices; and (e) workplace safety, discrimination, and harassment.

Workload, Pace, and Emotional Demands

Participating Ontario principals reported that their work is consistently high in pace, complexity, and emotional intensity. As shown in Figure 8, the highest pressure indicators were cognitive and relational: 99.5% always or often had to remember many things, 99.0% *always* or *often* had to pay attention to many things simultaneously, 95.8% *always* or *often* had to relate to other people's personal problems, and 95.7% *always* or *often* had to make difficult decisions. Emotional demands were nearly as prominent as time demands: 94.0% reported that their work was emotionally demanding *to a large* or *very large extent*, and 90.2% indicated that their work *always* or *often* put them in emotionally draining situations.

Figure 8. Highest Workload and Emotional Demand Indicators



Note. Bars represent the percentage of principals reporting high levels of each work demand. For items measured using *always/often/sometimes/seldom/never*, the percentage combines responses of *always* and *often*. For items measured using *to a very large extent/to a large extent /somewhat/to a small extent/to a very small extent*, the percentage combines responses of *to a very large extent* and *to a large extent*. Higher percentages indicate that a greater proportion of principals experienced that demand at a high level.

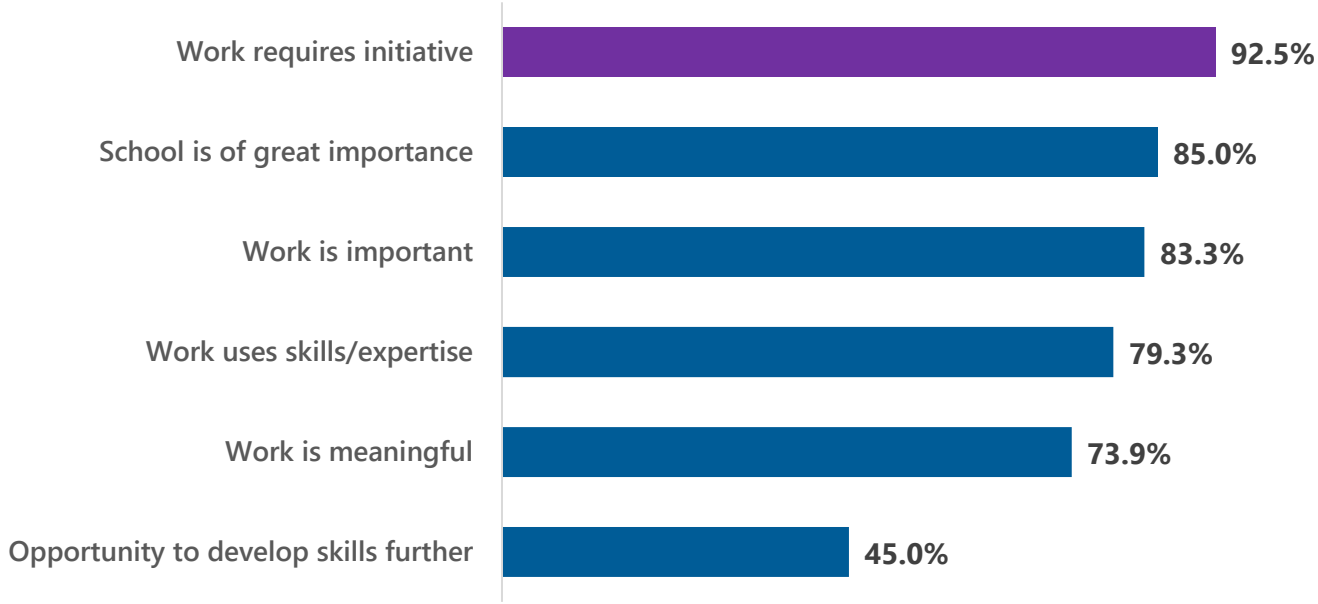
Many participating principals also reported having a backlog of unfinished work. More than two thirds of participants reported that their workload always or often piled up (79.2%) and that they always or often do not have enough time to complete all work tasks (79.2%). A further 70.0% always or often got behind with work. Only 7.7% said they always or often had enough time for their work tasks. The 2026 Ontario Principal Barometer results suggest that high pace, volume, and complexity are normal features of principals' workdays. Principals are not simply working through a long task list: They

are simultaneously managing urgent decisions, competing demands, personal problems of other people, and emotionally demanding situations. This combination is likely to make routine time-management strategies insufficient unless workload, staffing, and decision authority are addressed at the system level. Because of the nature of principals' work, it can be expected that they would experience some degree of these demands; however, it is the degree to which they are experiencing these demands that is alarming.

Job Satisfaction, Control, Meaning, and Professional Commitment

The relationship between job satisfaction and occupational stress is well documented for school principals (Fang et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2018). The sample showed that 48.6% of the principals were very satisfied or satisfied with their job as a whole, 57.6% were very satisfied or satisfied with the way their abilities were used, and 62.2% were very satisfied or satisfied with their physical working conditions. Principals reported a moderate level of influence over how they carry out their work. About one quarter (26.3%) reported that they always or often have a large degree of influence over their work. Compared with average Canadian workers, Ontario principals reported somewhat greater influence at work, suggesting many principals felt they had a reasonable amount of control over how they performed their job (Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers [OHCOW], 2023).

Figure 9. What Keeps Principals Connected to the Work



Almost three quarters of participating principals (73.9%) reported that their work was meaningful to a large or very large extent, 83.3% indicated that the work they do is important to a large or very large extent, and 85.0% indicated that their school was of great importance to them to a large or very large extent. Most also reported that the work allowed them to use their skills or expertise (79.3%) and required initiative (92.5%). However, 40.6% said they always or often considered looking for work elsewhere, suggesting that professional commitment does not eliminate risk of principals leaving their current leadership position.

85.0%

said their school was of great importance to them

40.6%

often or always considered looking for work elsewhere

High commitment coexists with retention risk.

English School Board Communication, Recognition, Leadership, and Support

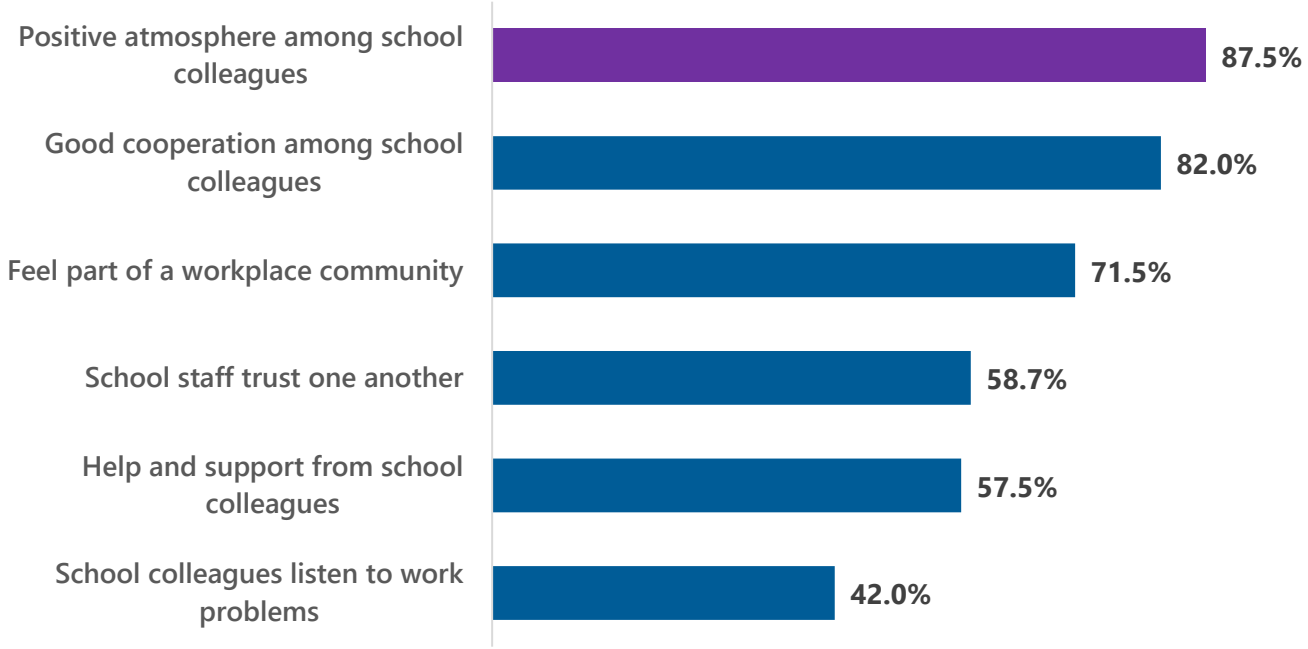
Participants indicated that there were issues with the communication they receive from school boards. Only 11.7% felt that they were informed well in advance about important decisions, changes, or future plans *to a large* or *very large extent*. Only 21.1% reported receiving all the information they need to do their work well.

Principals feel strongly supported inside their schools, but less supported by the broader system.

Work recognition and trust from the school boards was also low. Only 14.3% felt their work was recognized and appreciated by the school board to a *large* or *very large* extent, and only 21.2% indicated that their supervisory officers talk with them about how well they carry out their work. Only 12.0% said their suggestions were *always* or *often* treated seriously by the school board. Less than 40.0% felt that supervisory officers from their school boards *always* or *often* trusted principals to do their work well. The data on supervisory officer support was more promising: 49.6% reported that their supervisory officer was *always* or *often* willing to listen to work problems, while 42.2% always or often received help and support from their supervisory officer when needed. The picture was also more positive within the schools where principals worked. Most respondents reported that they *always* or *often* have a good atmosphere between themselves and colleagues (87.5%), good cooperation among colleagues (82.0%), and feel part of a community at work (71.5%). Help and support from colleagues inside the school was also relatively high (57.5% indicated *always* or *often*).

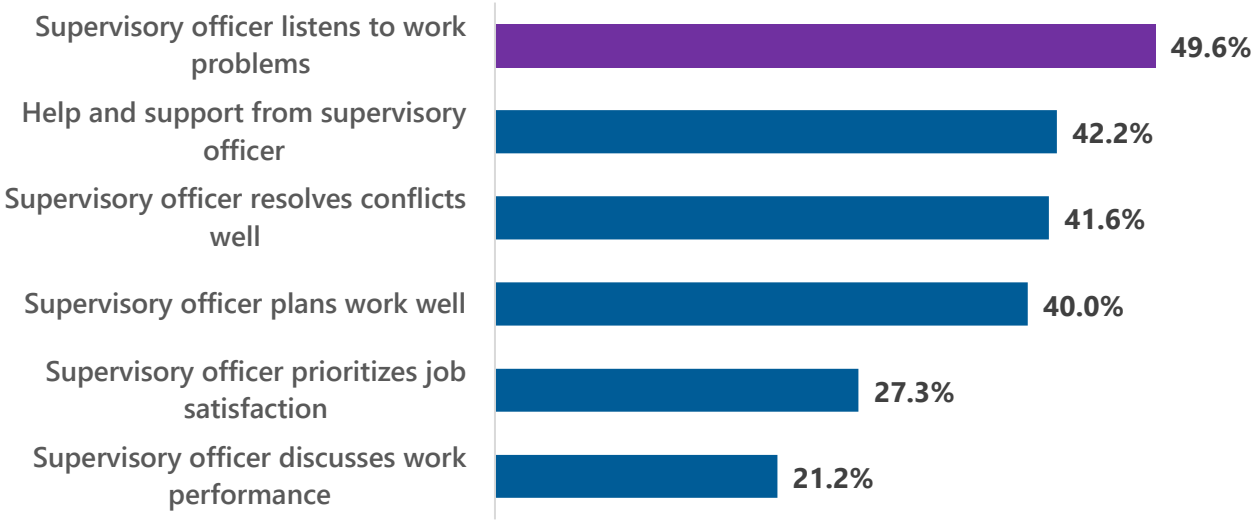
Although school-level supports appear fairly strong, system-level communication, recognition, and voice appear less robust. This distinction matters because the school-level community may support principals, but it cannot resolve structural issues such as workload allocation, role clarity, or information flow from the school board.

Figure 10. Leadership, Communication, Recognition, and Support Within the School



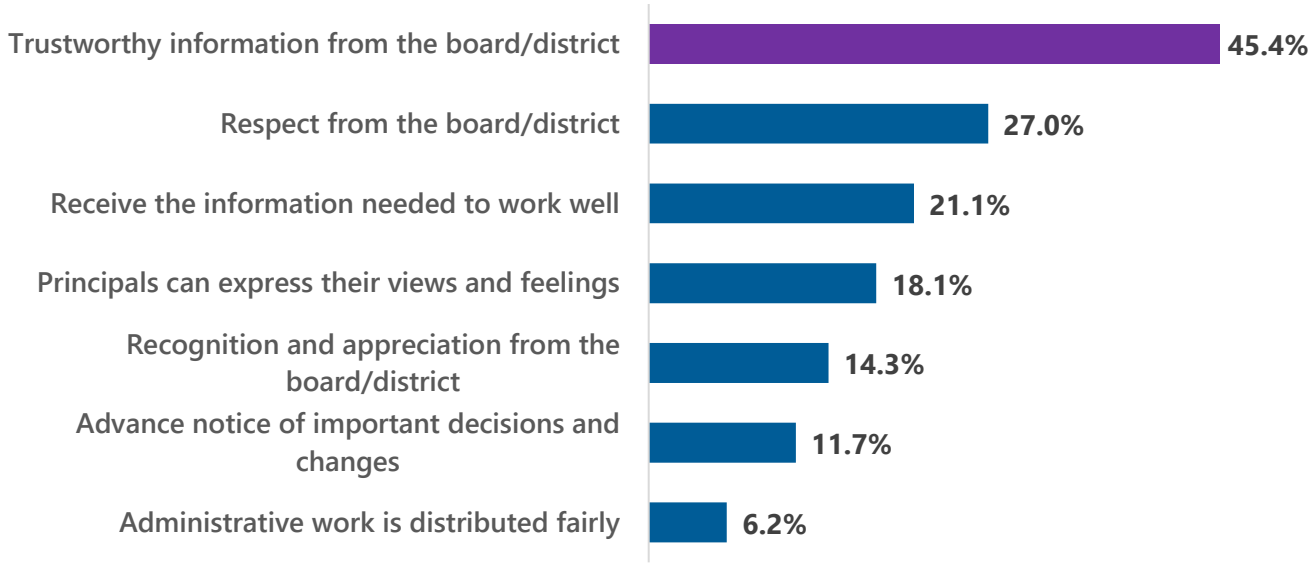
Note. Bars show the percentage of principals reporting a strong positive experience for each indicator. "High" responses combine *always* and *often* for frequency-based questions, or *to a very large extent* and *to a large extent* for extent-based questions. Longer bars indicate stronger support, leadership, communication, recognition, voice, or fairness. "School colleagues" refers to colleagues inside the respondent's school.

Figure 11. Leadership, Communication, Recognition, and Support at the Supervisory Officer Level



Note. Bars show the percentage of principals reporting a strong positive experience for each indicator. "High" responses combine *always* and *often* for frequency-based questions, or *to a very large extent* and *to a large extent* for extent-based questions. Longer bars indicate stronger support, leadership, communication, recognition, voice, or fairness. Supervisory officers are presented separately because they represent principals' direct formal leadership relationship rather than the school team or the board/district as a whole.

Figure 12. Leadership, Communication, Recognition, and Support at the School Board Level



Note. Bars show the percentage of principals reporting a strong positive experience for each indicator. "High" responses combine *always* and *often* for frequency-based questions, or *to a very large extent* and *to a large extent* for extent-based questions. Longer bars indicate stronger support, leadership, communication, recognition, voice, or fairness.

Work–Life Integration, Health, Burnout, Sleep, and Eating Practices

The 2026 Ontario Principal Barometer survey focused not only on principals' work but also on their wellness. As mentioned in the methodology section, we used several internationally validated scales to measure work–life integration, health, burnout, sleep, and eating practices.

73.7% work drains energy from private life

83.8% frequently tired

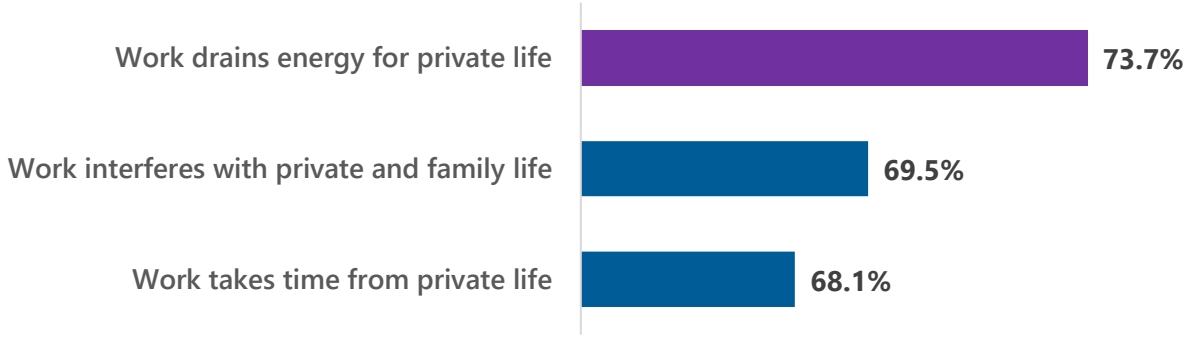
86.8% overwhelmed with work

6.0hrs average sleep

Work–Life Integration

In terms of work–life integration, work–life conflict was common: 73.7% of participants indicated that their work drained so much energy that it had a negative effect on their private life, 68.1% indicated that their work took so much time that it had a negative effect on their private life, and 69.5% indicated that work demands interfered with their private and family life.

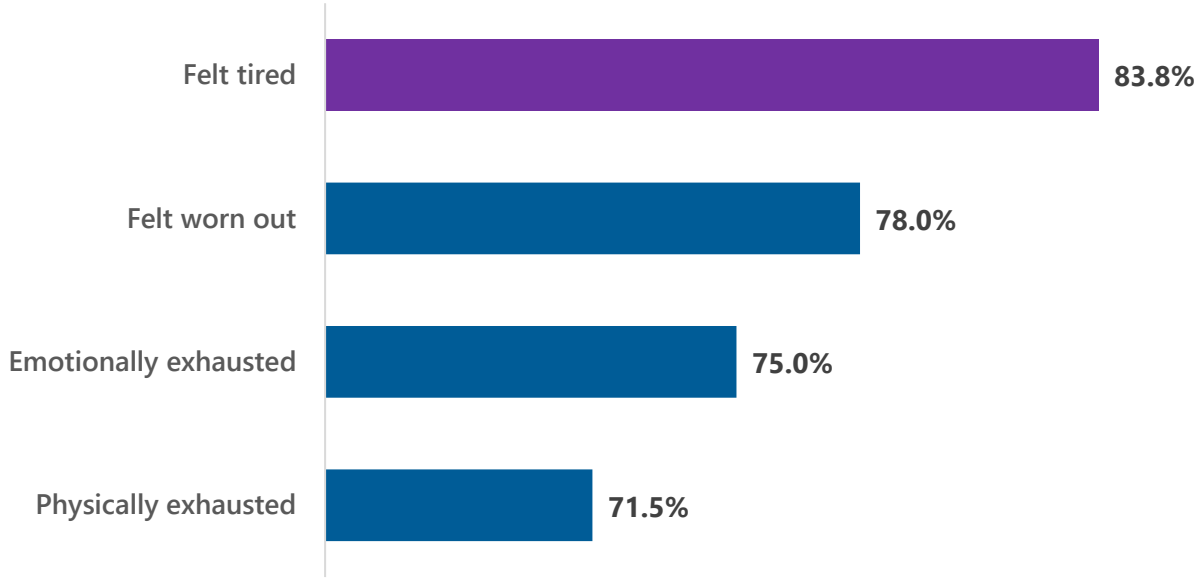
Figure 13. Work–Life Interference Among Participating Principals



Health

Health and recovery indicators showed that only 20.9% of principals in this survey described their health as *excellent* or *very good*, while 47.6% described it as *fair* or *poor*, making it worse than the Canadian average (Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers [OHCOW], 2023). Many reported feeling tired (83.8% *all the time* or a *large part of the time*), emotionally exhausted (75.0% *all the time* or a *large part of the time*), worn out (78.0% *all the time* or a *large part of the time*), and physically exhausted (71.5% *all the time* or a *large part of the time*). Participants also had problems relaxing (68.6% *all the time* or *often*), and over half of the respondents (65.9%) felt tense *all the time* or a *large part of the time*.

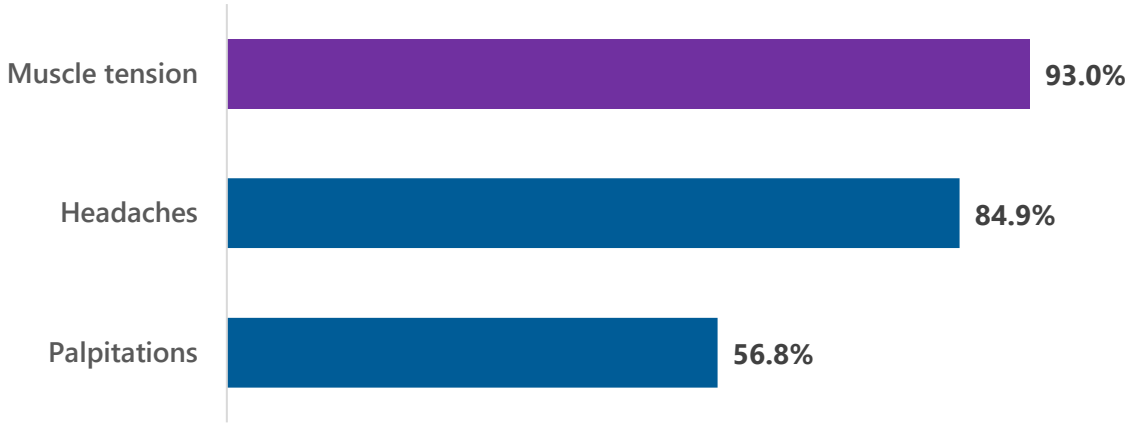
Figure 14. Exhaustion and Recovery Concerns among Participating Principals



48%
rated their health as fair or poor

In terms of physical health indicators, 84.9% of participants had a headache at least some of the time. Of these, 25.5% of participants had a headache *all the time* or *a large part of the time*. When asked if they have had palpitations only 43.2% said *not at all*; this means that 56.8% of principals experienced palpitations within the last year at least *a small part of the time*. More than half (57.2%) had muscle tension *all the time* or *a large part of the time*, and 35.8% had muscle tension *part of the time* or *a small part of the time*. Only 7.0% reported having no muscle tension in the last year.

Figure 15. Physical Health Symptoms Among Participating Principals

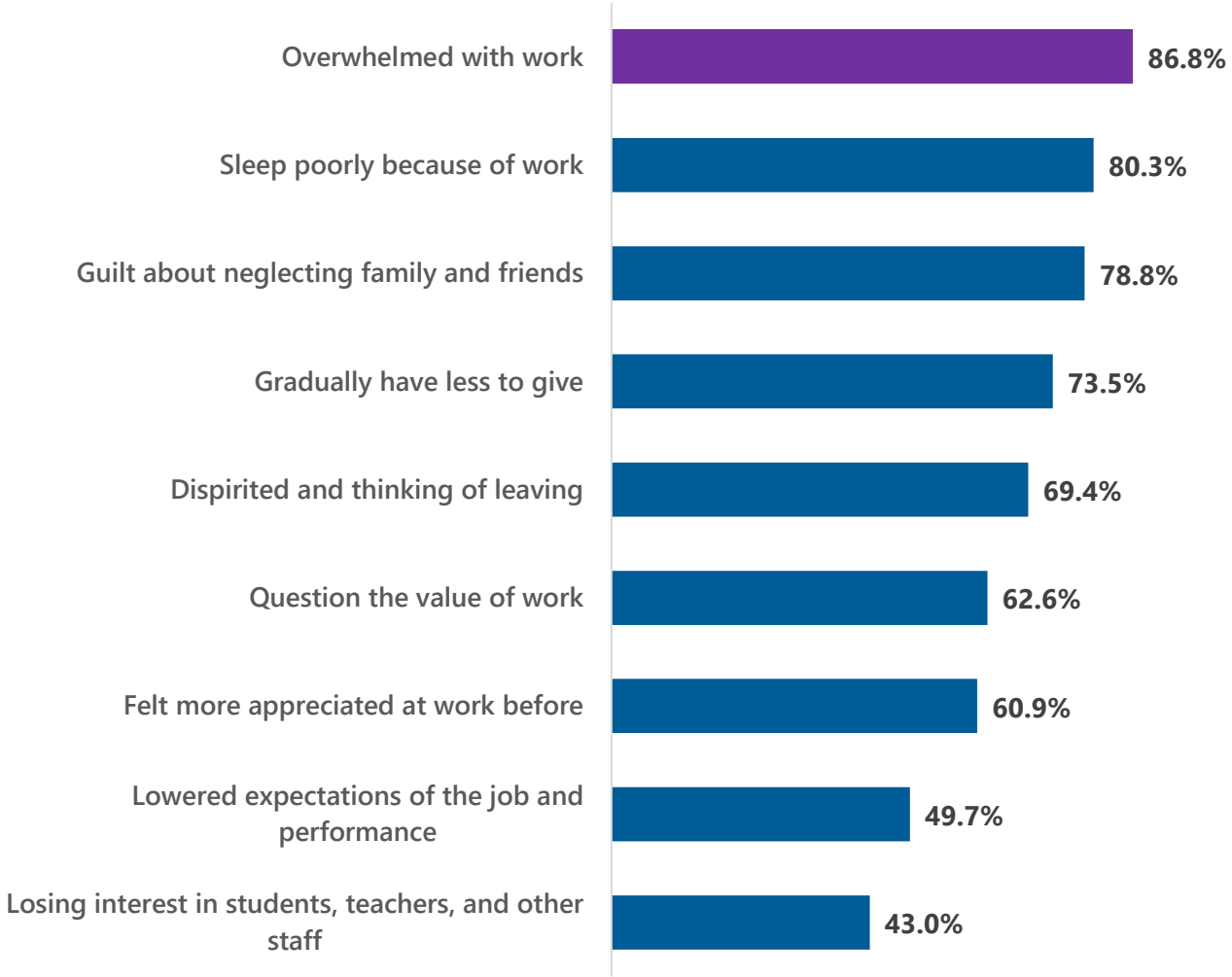


Note. Percentages combine all responses above *not at all*. For headaches, *at least some of the time* includes a *small part of the time, part of the time*, a *large part of the time*, and *all the time*. For palpitations and muscle tension, percentages represent participants who did not select *not at all*.

Burnout

In terms of burnout, the Bergen Burnout Inventory (BBI) is a mental health check-up tool that measures how severely a person is suffering from chronic work stress. The higher the rating, the higher the frequency of severity for burnout symptoms (Feldt et al., 2014). Burnout indicators showed that 86.8% at least partly agreed that they were overwhelmed with work, 80.3% at least partly agreed that they often slept poorly because of circumstances at work, and 73.5% at least partly agreed that they had gradually less to give to their work. In addition, 78.8% at least partly agreed that work forced them to neglect their close friends and family.

Figure 16. Burnout Concerns among Participating Principals



Sleep

In terms of sleep, the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) measures how well a person sleeps over a 1-month period. The sleep data suggest that some participating principals may be experiencing insufficient or disrupted sleep, which may limit opportunities for adequate rest and recovery. Respondents reported an average of 6.0 hours of actual sleep per night, taking an average of 33.5 minutes to fall asleep. More than half rated their sleep quality as *fairly bad* or *very bad* (55.1%). Waking during the night or early morning was especially common: 85.8% reported this at least once or twice a week, including 62.3% three or more times a week. Work also intruded directly into sleep routines: 81.3% had woken up early to get work done, and 71.0% had stayed up late because of work.



Note. Percentages in this section show the proportion of principals reporting a concern-level response for each indicator. For general health, this means *fair* or *poor health*. For exhaustion items, this means *all the time* or *a large part of the time*. For work–life interference, this means *to a very large extent* or *to a large extent*. For burnout items, percentages combine *partly agree*, *agree*, and *completely agree*. For sleep quality, percentages combine *fairly bad* and *very bad*. Work-related early waking and staying up late were classified as concerns when they occurred *weekly* or *daily*. Longer bars indicate that a greater percentage of principals reported the concern.

Eating Practices

The survey also asked participants about their eating practices. Most respondents reported having limited time and attention for meals: As shown in Figure 17, 61.4% *never* or *rarely t*ook time to eat meals, 89.2% *never* or *rarely* ate slowly, and 90.8% *often* or *always* engaged in other activities while eating, such as working, driving, or using a phone or computer. Emotional eating was also common, with 39.6% reporting that they *often* or *always* ate when feeling emotional even when not hungry. On the other hand, the results also suggest that many principals engage in positive eating practices: 73.5% of participants indicated that they eat home-cooked meals from scratch four or more times per week, and 53.7% cooked from scratch four or more times per week. Most agreed or strongly agreed that eating was a pleasure (68.9%), that they enjoyed trying new foods (74.0%), that they enjoyed cooking (59.6%), and that they enjoyed eating with others (89.9%).

Figure 17. Eating-Practice Concerns

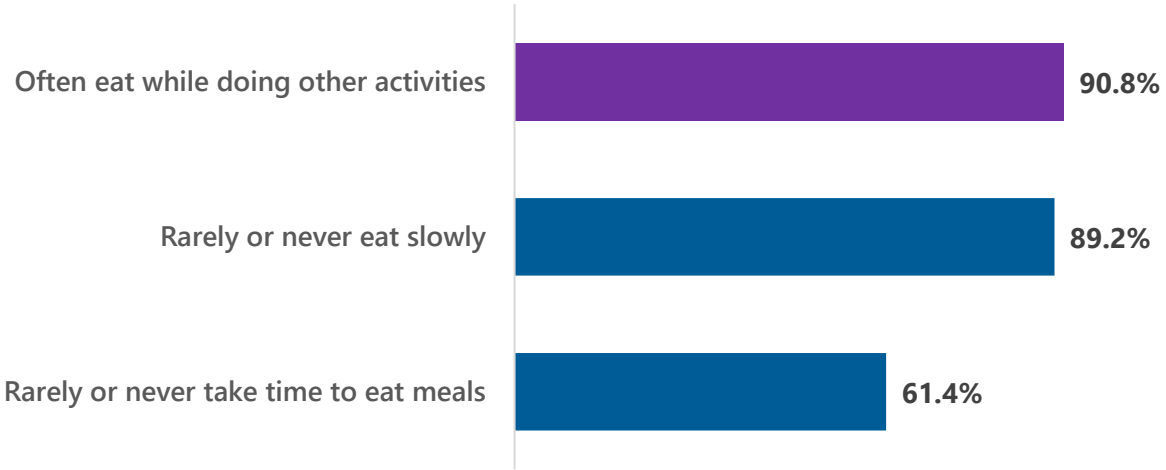
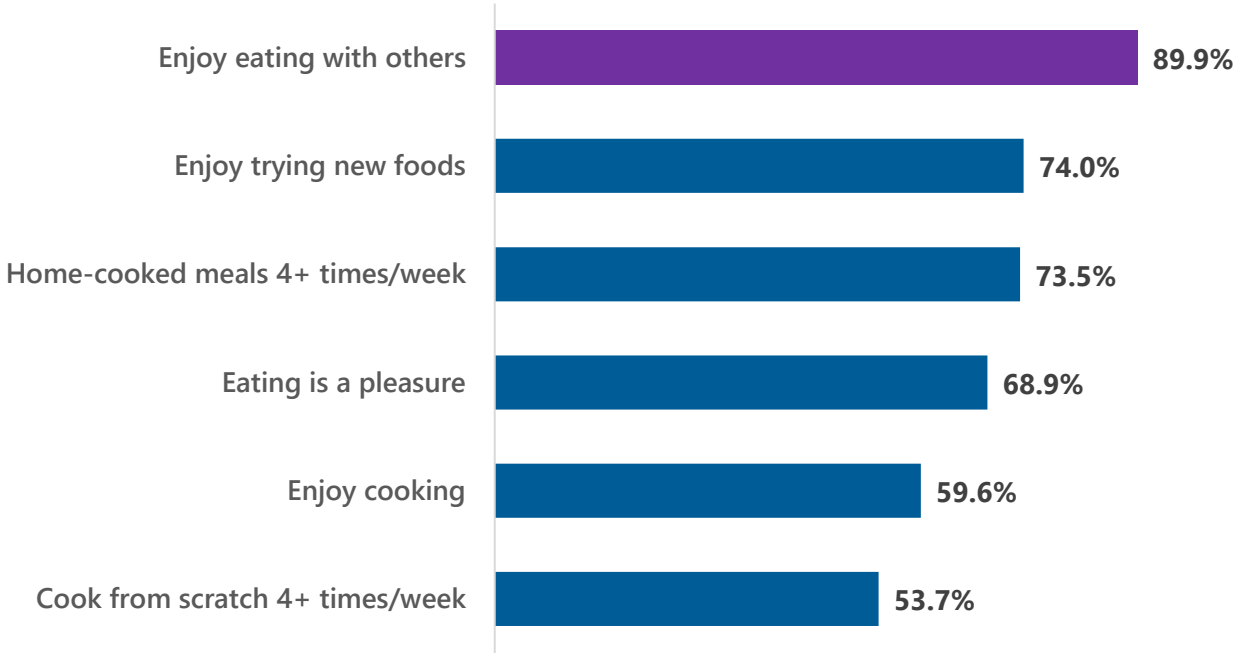


Figure 18. Eating-Practice Values



Note. For meal time and attention items, concerns were defined as *never* or *rarely* taking time to eat or eating slowly, or *often* or *always* eating while doing other activities. For meal preparation and planning, concerns were defined as *never* or *rarely* eating home-cooked meals or cooking from scratch less than once per week. Longer bars indicate that a greater percentage of principals endorsed the practice or value.

The eating practices data provide additional information about principals' everyday habits. Limited mealtime and frequent multitasking while eating were common. Although principals appear to have positive food-related values and practices, the clearest area for support is mealtime and attention.

Principals generally value food and cooking, but work appears to interfere with how they actually eat during the day.

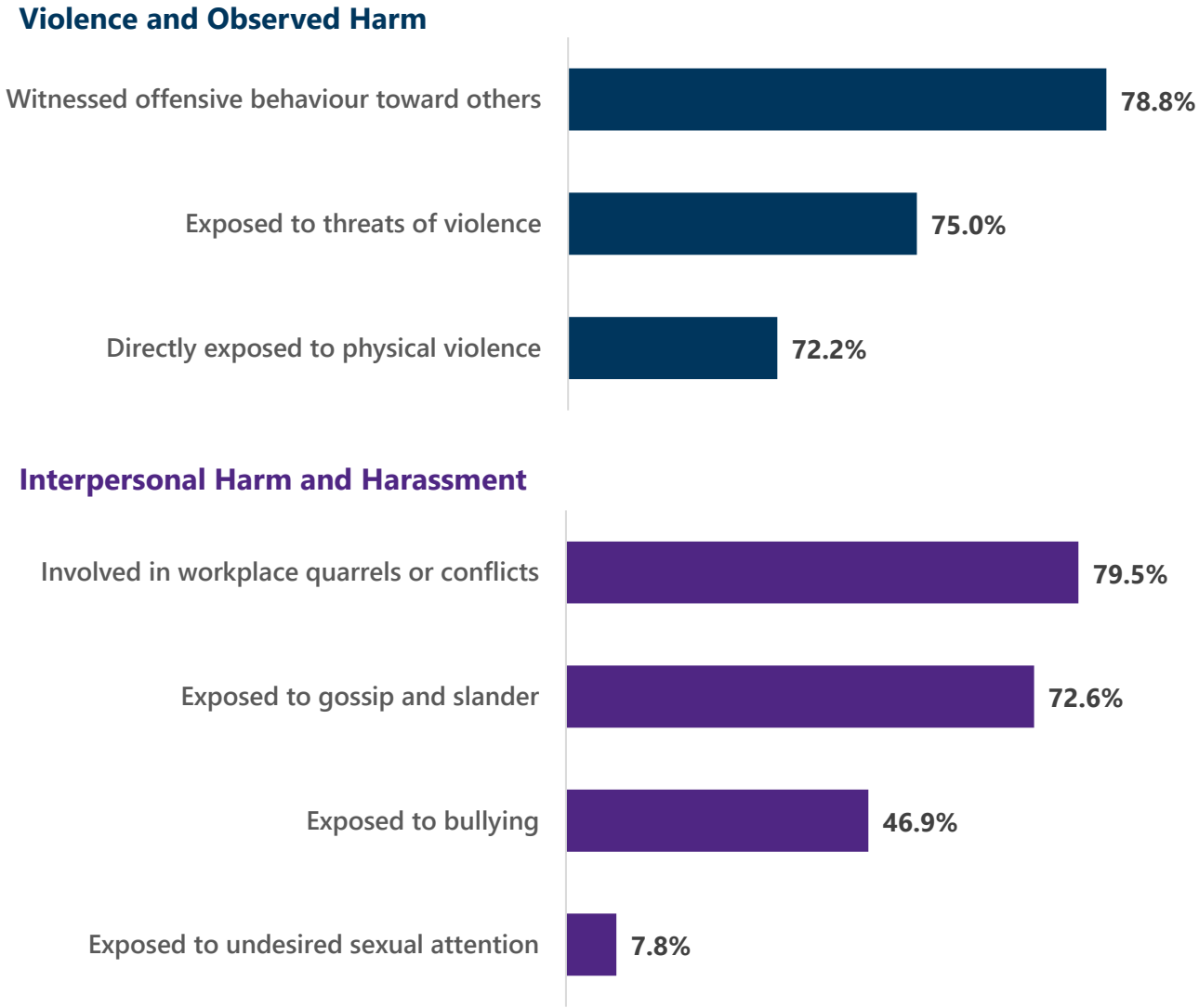
Workplace Safety, Discrimination, and Harassment

Recent reports from unions representing educators in Ontario have all pointed to an alarming rise in the number of violent incidents in Ontario schools (ETFO, 2023, OSSTF/FEESO, 2024, Fearon et al., 2025, CUPE-OSBCU, 2025). Because there has been increased attention to violence in K–12 public schools, the survey asked school principals about workplace safety, harassment, and discrimination. Safety concerns were a major finding in the Ontario results (See Figure 19). The data suggest principals are exposed to threats, direct violence, bullying, conflict, and relational harm while also carrying responsibility for school safety.

At least once during the previous 12 months, 79.5% of participants had been involved in workplace quarrels or conflicts, 75.0% had received threats of violence, 72.6% had been exposed to gossip and slander, 72.2% had been directly exposed to physical violence, and 46.9% had been exposed to bullying. Undesired sexual attention was less commonly reported (7.8%).

When looking at more frequent exposure, one fifth were involved in quarrels or conflicts weekly or monthly (20.8%), one quarter were exposed to gossip and slander weekly or monthly (25.6%), and nearly a third of principals (31.6%) were exposed to threats of violence or physical violence (29.3%) weekly or monthly.

Figure 19. Workplace Violence, Harm, and Harassment in the Past 12 Months



Note. For violence, observed harm, interpersonal harm, and harassment indicators, percentages represent principals who reported experiencing the event at least once during the past 12 months; responses of *daily*, *weekly*, *monthly*, and *a few times* were combined. The "witnessed offensive behaviour" item includes observing undesired sexual attention, threats of violence, bullying, or discrimination directed toward someone else at the respondent's school. Longer bars indicate that a greater percentage of principals reported the experience. Indicators are not mutually exclusive, and a principal may be represented in more than one bar.

Sources of unsafe behaviour differed by behaviour type. Among respondents who reported threats of violence, students were identified most often (56.1%), followed by parents/guardians (33.0%). Among those who reported direct physical violence, students were the dominant source (83.4%). Among those who indicated that they experienced bullying, parents/guardians were the most common source (50.48%). Gossip and slander were most often attributed to parents/guardians (36.7%) and colleagues (32.2%).

Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment

33%
reported workplace discrimination in the previous year

The survey also asked principals about workplace discrimination. In the "Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment" (COPSOQ) section of the survey, principals were not only asked how frequently they encountered different experiences at work, but also what they thought the main reason was for the experience. Nearly one third of respondents reported that they had been exposed to discrimination at work during the previous year (32.8%). Among those reporting discrimination, the most frequently selected sources were parents/guardians (30.5%), students (13.4%), and staff in school (16.0%). When asked if they felt they had to work twice as hard as others, 64.5% of participants reported feeling this way at least once or twice a year, and 26.1% felt this way at least weekly. When asked about the main reason for this, nearly a quarter of respondents (23.7%) indicated gender, almost a fifth indicated either ancestry or race (18.1%), and 10.3% indicated age.

When asked if they felt they had to work twice as hard

64.5%
experienced this at least once or twice a year

26.1%
experienced this at least weekly

Perceived reasons:

23.7% gender **18.1% ancestry/race** **10.3% age**

Note. *Percentages for perceived reasons are based on respondents who answered the corresponding follow-up question. Selected reasons are shown.*

When asked how frequently a coworker with less experience and fewer qualifications was promoted before them nearly half (43.2%) indicated that this had happened between once a year and a few times a year. The reasoning was similar to the question about working harder than others: over a quarter indicated that they felt this was because of their gender (26.1%), another quarter (26.1%) indicated ancestry or race, and 15.3% indicated age.

When asked if less-experienced/less-qualified coworkers were promoted first

43.2%
Reported this between once and a few times per year

Perceived reasons:

26.1% ancestry/race
26.1% gender
15.3% age

Note. *Percentages for perceived reasons are based on respondents who answered the corresponding follow-up question. Selected reasons are shown.*

When asked how frequently they feel they are ignored or not taken seriously by their boss, 38.6% indicated that this happens to them between once and a few times per year. When asked why they thought this was, 20.2% indicated gender and 16.9% indicated age.

When asked if they felt ignored or not taken seriously by employer

38.6%

Reported this between once and a few times per year

Perceived reasons:

20.2% gender
16.9% age
13.6% ancestry/race

Note. *Percentages for perceived reasons are based on respondents who answered the corresponding follow-up question. Selected reasons are shown.*

Overall Insights

High Demands + High Meaning
Strong professional commitment coexists with exhaustion, sleep disruption, and work–life interference.

Recovery is Compromised
Burnout, work–life conflict, sleep quality, and limited time for meals are recurring concerns.

Support is Uneven
School-level community is strong, while board-level communication, recognition, and voice have room for improvement.

Safety Needs System Attention
Threats, physical violence, bullying, conflict, and discrimination are substantial workplace concerns.

There are several overall insights to draw from the 2026 Ontario Principal Barometer findings. First, the data indicate that, for the participating principals, high demands coexist with high meaning: Although the principals in this study strongly endorsed the importance of their work, they also reported exhaustion, sleep disruption, and work–life interference. Second, Ontario principals indicated that they are more strongly supported at the school level, but board-level support has room for improvement. Third, the data indicate that burnout, work–life conflict, impaired sleep quality, and limited time and opportunity to engage in healthy eating practices are major issues for the participating principals. Many respondents are

experiencing symptoms of burnout (including exhaustion and stress), they are not sleeping well and reported limited time and attention for meals. Fourth, the participating principals are experiencing significant workplace safety issues. They reported exposure to threats of violence, direct physical violence, bullying, and gossip and slander. The findings also show that several principals felt they are experiencing discrimination at work based on their gender, their ancestry/race, and their age. Considered together, the 2026 Ontario Principal Barometer survey findings suggest that principal well-being needs to be urgently addressed at every level.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and insights above, we have formulated several recommendations for the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Auditor General of Ontario, professional associations, and principals.

01 / Conduct Workload Reviews to Examine Workload Intensity and Work Distribution

We encourage boards to work collaboratively with professional associations to conduct workload reviews that will identify nonessential school administrative tasks and duplicative reporting to the boards. In terms of task distribution, we recommend that the Ministry of Education allocate targeted funding for additional administrative office staff and other educational support staff such as educational assistants in areas that most affect daily pace and after-hours work, and that boards prioritize staffing these roles. We recommend that professional associations engage in discussions with Ontario's English teacher unions (ETFO, OSSTF, and OECTA) and the support staff union (CUPE) so that improvements made for one workforce do not have a reciprocal negative influence on the other.

02 / Improve Communication Processes within Districts

The findings indicate that there is room for improvement in communication between boards and principals. We recommend that boards harness advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve the transparency of decision-making and ensure principals receive the information they need to effectively run their schools. We recommend that professional associations engage in discussions with boards to identify more efficient and transparent communications systems.

03 / Improve Role Clarity

We recommend that the Ministry of Education (a) clearly define school leadership responsibilities and (b) distribute leadership to avoid continually expanding principals' responsibilities (OECD, 2008).

04 / Engage in Explicit Recognition and Appreciation

Much of principals' work is often invisible, such as managing difficult situations, supporting staff, responding to crises, and maintaining school operations. We recommend that board leaders engage in explicit forms of recognition and appreciation for work done well.

05 / Monitor Mental Health and Engage in Early Intervention to Prevent Burnout

We recommend that boards work with experts in occupational health and well-being to establish processes for regularly monitoring principals' well-being and identifying early signs of burnout. We also recommend that professional associations repeat core measures associated with the Principal Barometer such as burnout and work–life conflict over time to monitor whether interventions reduce workload pile-up, improve job control, reduce unsafe incidents, and improve sleep, health, and burnout indicators. These processes can provide timely, confidential support and early intervention before concerns become more severe.

06 / Support Principals in Improving Their Sleep and Eating Habits by Enlisting Experts to Provide Tailored Resources and Professional Learning Opportunities

Compromised sleep and nutrition can negatively affect principals' leadership practices by limiting their ability to meet the self-care needs that support optimal cognitive functioning (Ray et al., 2020). For this reason, it is recommended that professional associations enlist sleep and eating experts to create professional learning opportunities that focus on healthy eating and sleeping habits.

07 / Treat Threats, Violence, Bullying, and Conflict as Occupational Health and Safety Priorities

The study findings point to a high prevalence of workplace harm among participating principals. We encourage the Ministry of Education and school boards to collaboratively establish a coordinated, system-wide approach to preventing and responding to workplace threats, violence, bullying, and conflict. Drawing on established occupational health and safety approaches, including principles reflected in the federal Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations (SOR/2020-130), this approach can include regular assessment of workplace risks, clear and consistent reporting and response protocols, appropriate education and training, post-incident debriefing, practical coverage that allows principals to step away from their duties when needed, timely follow-up care and supports, and ongoing monitoring and review of incidents to identify patterns of risk and strengthen preventative action.

08 / Develop Support Guides for Principals Who Have Experienced Violence

Principals occupy a tenuous position within the existing Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) legislation, including Bill 168. They exist within the middle space between "the employer," school boards, and "the workers." They are figured as "the employer" who is responsible for reporting, intervening, and protecting staff. Ontario unions such as CUPE, ETFO, OSSTF, and OECTA have their own policies for supporting teachers and other educational staff amid violence in schools but principals, because they are considered management, do not have the same level of supports. Moreover, most school board crisis plans often only figure school administrators as those responsible for supporting staff who have experienced violence, whereas our data shows that principals themselves also experience violence in Ontario public schools. We recommend that school boards work with professional associations to develop support guides for principals who have experienced violence in schools.

09 / Audit the 2024 provincial funding into Combating Violence and Improving Safety in Schools

Our findings indicate that three quarters of the participating principals experienced threats of or direct violence in Ontario public schools in 2025. According to a 2023 press release, "Ontario Combating Violence and Improving Safety in Schools," the Ontario Ministry of Education was planning to invest $24 million to "reduce the risk of violence in schools." This funding was going to be allocated to youth programs and community organizations as well as salaries for psychologists, social workers, and child and youth workers. Currently, no data are available on how this funding was administered and how the uptake of this funding has influenced violence in schools. We recommend that the Auditor General of Ontario investigate the use of the 2024 funding to (a) provide actionable data that the provincial government, teachers unions, and provincial associations can use to improve school environments and (b) identify potential areas of growth or fund reallocation.

10 / Continue to Address Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization, Anti-Oppression Issues

While the population of participants who did participate in this study demonstrated some ethno-racial diversity, participants were overwhelmingly White. There is a large body of research showing that diversifying the principal workforce can support student success (e.g., Hannan et al., 2025; Ryan et al., 2009). We recommend that the Ministry of Education work with the boards and professional associations to create the conditions that will support a racially diverse principal workforce and ensure that non-White principals are not only hired but also supported and retained long term. Moreover, the 2026 Principal Barometer data also indicate that discrimination, when it does occur, is based on race, gender, and, to a lesser extent, age. We recommend that both the Ministry of Education and boards work with professional associations to continue to address race, gender, and age discrimination directly by conducting an equity audit and examining patterns of workforce data, such as hiring and promotion patterns and complaints.

11 / Set Boundaries

Without overemphasizing the need for principals to change their individual practices or approaching principals' work from a deficit perspective, we recommend that principals engage in boundary management where possible. Findings from this study suggest that principals' work can extend beyond the formal workday, with competing demands, ongoing communication, and unfinished work encroaching on time intended for rest and recovery. Boundary management (Shaked & Benoliel, 2020) may include establishing reasonable limits around after-hours communication, protecting periods of non-work recovery time, identifying when work can be deferred rather than completed immediately, and communicating expectations about availability. Importantly, principals' capacity to establish and maintain these boundaries is shaped by their working conditions. Boundary management should therefore be supported by supervisory officers' practices and expectations that make it possible for principals to disengage from work and recover during non-work hours.

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