

PRINCIPALS

From the People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



PRINCIPALS

...the role of school principal designed for the industrial age has not changed enough to deal with the complex challenges schools are facing in the 21st century.

Improving School Leadership, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Great schools need great leaders.

When principals can ensure that all of the components of a school are working well together—by setting clear directions toward common goals, establishing high expectations and providing teachers with support—students are more successful, and the school community is stronger.¹

The evidence shows unequivocally that, after teachers, the investment that has the most positive impact on students' capacity to learn and to succeed is the investment in recruiting and training effective principals and vice-principals.²

SOME ONTARIO PRINCIPALS RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL

This year, 12% of elementary schools report their principals are part-time, double the percentage in 1997/98. In some cases, the part-time principals are teachers as well, and in other cases (7% of schools), they are responsible for more than one school. Five per cent of secondary school principals are part-time.

There are also wide variations across the province: While only 3% of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) elementary schools have a part-time principal, 29% of Northern Ontario elementary school principals are part-time.

In addition to an increase in the number of part-time principals in elementary schools, there has been a decrease in the percentage of schools with either full- or part-time vice-principals—from 54% in 1997/98, to 42% this year.

LIMITED EXPERIENCE AND SHORT TENURES AFFECT SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Fostering strong connections is a key role for school principals, but many principals are in their schools, and thus their communities, for a very short period of time. Many also lack experience. Surveys of principals by the [Education Quality and Accountability Office \(EQAO\)](#) show that 49% of elementary principals have been in their current school for two years or less, and 49% have been principals for a total of five years or less.³ The [Ontario Principals' Council](#) has recommended that administrators be guaranteed tenures of at least five years per school.⁴

QUICK FACTS FOR 2010/11

- 12% of elementary school principals are part-time, double the percentage in 1997/98.
- 42% of elementary schools have a vice-principal, compared to 54% in 1997/98.
- 49% of elementary school principals have been in their current schools for two years or less.

EXPANDING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Schools work best when principals can focus on building cooperative “learning communities” among the staff, fostering strong links between school and community, and ensuring the school provides equitable opportunities for all students. However, many principals report their time is dominated by paperwork, management issues, new government directives and “administrivia.”⁵

Over the last two decades, the role of the principal has expanded substantially to include more managerial and administrative responsibilities, including more responsibility for facilities management, and an ever-increasing number of government-directed initiatives and accountability requirements. One review of provincial initiatives for the eight-month period from June 2009 to January 2010 revealed 64 different Ministry directives to principals.⁶

Principals and vice-principals have also taken on an increased responsibility for supervising students before and after school and at recess and lunch time; this is in response to reductions in the time teachers are required to perform this function.⁷

These administrative tasks leave many principals with little time to act as “instructional leaders”—a core component of a successful school leader's job.⁸

RECRUITING NEW PRINCIPALS

Great principals are the key to great schools, but it has become increasingly difficult to interest teachers in applying for these jobs, and the pool of candidates for principalship is rapidly shrinking.⁹ A report from the OECD found that “potential

candidates often hesitate to apply, because of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards.”¹⁰

In Ontario,

- principals surveyed by the Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario say that, while they love their jobs, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill their vast array of responsibilities,¹¹
- the Ontario Principals’ Council has described the current role of principal as “almost unmanageable”,¹²
- there are fewer vice-principal positions available, which means fewer placements for future principals to learn the role, and
- recruitment is difficult because teachers who decide to become principals must leave their teachers’ federation and lose all seniority, which makes it impossible for teachers to “test drive” the role. In Quebec, this situation has been remedied by granting teachers a two-year leave of absence to try leadership positions and return to teaching without loss of seniority.¹³

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In response to the pressures facing Ontario principals, the Ontario government launched the Ontario Leadership Strategy in 2008. One facet of this strategy includes increased mentorship for new principals. Mentors can play a vital role, given that nearly half of Ontario principals have five years of experience or less. But in the survey of Catholic principals, only 53% say they have a mentor. And while these principals report that their mentors are very helpful, many say they don’t have enough time to consult with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strong principals, working cooperatively with teachers and the school community, are crucial to student success.

People for Education recommends

- the province provide funding for other staff to take over some of the responsibility for school and facilities management, and for school-community coordination,
- the province increase funding for vice-principals to allow more chances for “apprenticeships,”
- that new policy is developed to allow teachers to “test drive” the role of the principal for two years without a loss of seniority in the teacher unions, and
- school boards endeavour to ensure that principals’ terms are at least five years.

WHAT PRINCIPALS TOLD US . . .

We have had an additional VP assigned to our school, but the new VP has been assigned a teaching load that accounts for 1.33 full-time teaching loads. Now all three of my VPs must share the teaching load. This has resulted in a net loss of VP administration.

Secondary School, Windsor-Essex CDSB

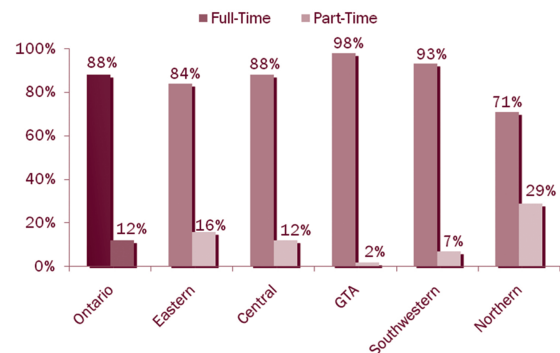
We are a little school with a big heart... [But] we are all stretched to the max because there are so few of us to keep up with all the mandated initiatives... Being an instructional leader is becoming increasingly challenging as a teaching principal with multiple roles and responsibilities.

Elementary School, Renfrew County DSB

Over the past couple of years, support in our schools through the hiring of “Special Assignment Teachers” has been cut... [These] teachers were an integral part of the school and supported initiatives that the Ministry of Education introduced and which continue to move forward. We now have no Special Assignment Teachers left. All this support now rests on the shoulders of the principal.

Elementary School, Superior North CDSB

Principals in elementary schools, by region



NOTES

- 1 Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2010, October). *Principal questionnaire: Provincial results*. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/provquestionnaire/0910/G36_2010_PO_P01.PDF
- 4 Ontario Principals' Council. (2008, May). Response to the Ministry of Education's Comprehensive Leadership Strategy. On file with author.
- 5 Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. (2010, March). Draft results of the Ontario Leadership Survey, (March 2010). On file with author.
- 6 Ontario Principals' Council. (n.d.). Ontario Principals' Council Ministry initiatives. On file with author.
- 7 Ontario Principals' Council. (2007, February 16). School principals establish standards for learning and safety [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.principals.ca/Documents/News%20release.pdf>
- 8 See note 1.
- 9 Institute for Education Leadership (Ontario). (2008, September). *Succession planning for Ontario schools and school boards*. Retrieved from <http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/storage/2/1284604393/SuccessionPlanningSummary.pdf>
- 10 Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership, Volume 1: Policy and practice*. Paris, France: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved from http://www.ivea.ie/schools/school_leadership/improving_school_leadership_vol_1.pdf
- 11 See note 5.
- 12 See note 4.
- 13 See note 9, page 10.



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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<http://peopleforeducation.com/annualreport/school2011.pdf>