

Building Brighter Futures

A Comprehensive Education Plan for Ontario's Next Generation





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Building Brighter Futures: A Comprehensive Education Plan for Ontario's Next Generation

Ontario's education sector requires immediate and urgent attention. Over 2 million students attend school, with approximately 94%^[1] enrolled in the province's publicly funded institutions. Supporting these students are 145,000^[2] dedicated principals, vice-principals, teachers and support staff who keep the 4,800 schools running effectively.

The primary purpose of our education system is to prepare students for their futures, as postsecondary students, employees and productive and contributing members of our communities and societies. Twenty-five years into the 21st century, the landscape of education has transformed dramatically due to social media, technology, robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), equity initiatives, digital learning and a new focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). The impact of these sweeping changes is that our education system has struggled to adapt.

- We have a critical teacher shortage, particularly in the skilled trades and STEAM fields.
- While the government wants more of a focus on skilled trades, technology and specialist high skills majors, many schools do not have the equipment, space or resources to offer specialized courses in these areas.
- Many schools lack specialized programs and training to support students with learning needs, which has increased aggressive behaviours within the school setting.
- Significant outcome and opportunity gaps continue to exist for under-served communities.
- There is a staggering backlog in repairs and renovations in Ontario schools of approximately \$21.7 billion.^[3]



^[1] Ontario Ministry of Education

^[2] Ontario Ministry of Education

^[3] Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2024

On the front lines of these schools and this system are principals and vice-principals (P/VPs), who witness the changes, challenges and gaps every day. While we acknowledge and applaud the work of all education staff for their untiring efforts to meet the increasingly complex and challenging needs of students, more must be done to ensure that every student in Ontario has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), representing over 5,400 P/VPs in the province's public schools, calls on all political parties to work with us, and all members of the education sector, to accomplish this goal.

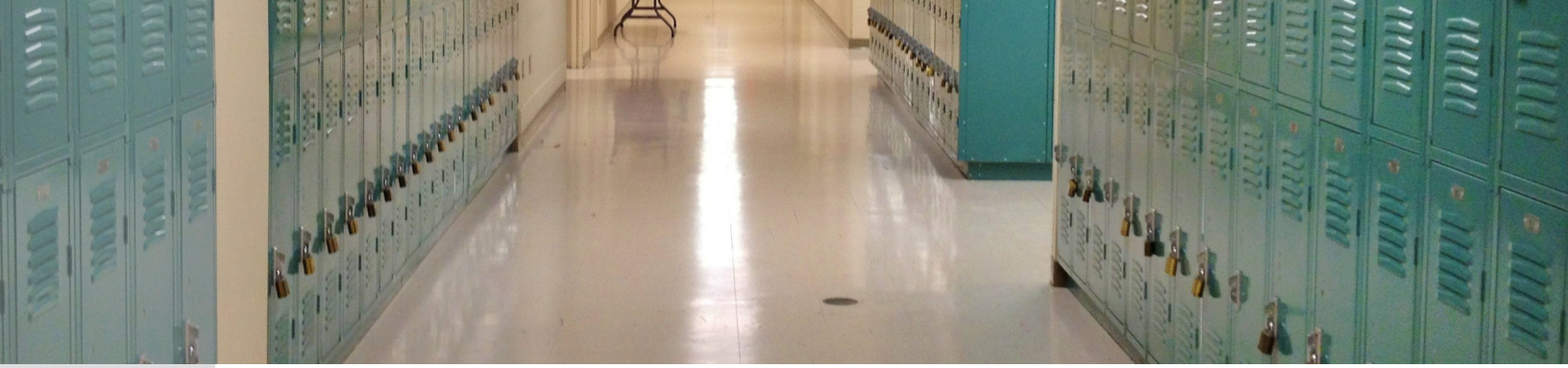
The Intensification of our Role

At one time, the role of a P/VP was to be the instructional leader in the school. Today, we are tasked with many other roles including business manager, accountant, safety inspector, medical professional, mental health professional, supervisor, social worker, secretary, custodian and attendance manager. These additional responsibilities have added an enormous amount of work to our role, and drastically reduced the time we can spend doing what we are supposed to be doing – mentoring teachers and supporting students. This excessive workload is having an increasingly negative impact on our students, school communities and the system at large.

System Challenges

Despite the best efforts of education employees, there are many challenges in our system that hamper our efforts around student achievement. Below we have highlighted what we consider to be the most urgent issues.





Staff Shortages

Staff shortages, which were manageable pre-pandemic, have escalated dramatically since then, disrupting daily operations. These shortages affect all employee groups and have tangible consequences.

In surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024, principals and vice-principals have reported persistent and serious issues.^[4]

- **54%** report an increase in the number of daily staff shortages in their school this year.
- **53%** have to use unqualified staff to fill vacancies every week.
- **42%** of elementary and **46%** of secondary schools report shortages of Educational Assistants (EAs) every single day.
- **32%** grapple with staff shortages in their schools every day.
- **20%** must redirect EAs – the specialized staff who work with our most vulnerable and at-risk students – to classrooms to cover for absent teachers, impacting critical instruction for the students in the system who have the most needs.
- Fewer staff results in less supervision before, during and after the school day, directly impacting safety for students and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Develop systems to address staff shortages without relying solely on P/VPs filling in, such as flexible staffing agreements, Letters of Understanding or temporary support staff.
- 2.** Look at how to improve staff attendance, such as re-incentivizing sick leave, which has now been done for firefighters.
- 3.** Expand the number of Occasional Teachers to cover staffing gaps effectively.
- 4.** Revert back to a one-year Initial Teacher Education program with an optional paid co-op or mentoring placement to address staffing needs.
- 5.** Offer tuition relief to Initial Teacher Education students and to under-represented identity groups to attract more diverse candidates to the profession.
- 6.** Find creative solutions to add more EAs and Child and Youth Workers to our schools, including subsidizing some of the tuition costs for these programs, as has been done for nurses and Personal Support Workers.

^[4] All noted statistics come from a 2023 Abacus Data survey and/or a 2024 OPC survey



Work Intensification and Unceasing Ministry Initiatives

The role of the P/VP continues to expand, with an increasing number of duties, and more complex expectations. With the legislative requirements of the Ministry of Education, Ontario College of Teachers and school board employers, it is virtually impossible for any P/VP to complete all expected tasks within a workday.

Principals and vice-principals have reported that

- **99%** have seen their workload increase since 2019.
- **97%** say workload is unmanageable.
- **93%** are overwhelmed by the volume and number of their duties.
- **92%** of their time is spent on work not directly related to student achievement.
- Many feel they have become business managers instead of instructional leaders.

The Ministry of Education added 13 new initiatives, directly impacting P/VP workload, in the 2023-24 school year alone. While many new expectations and responsibilities are added to the plate of a P/VP, few duties come off, resulting in ever increasing workloads and recruitment concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. In conjunction with education partner groups, conduct a review of ministry initiatives and eliminate those unrelated to instructional leadership, mentoring or direct student achievement.
8. Streamline ministry and school board priorities, eliminating outdated or unnecessary initiatives and administrative tasks.
9. Balance new responsibilities by removing existing ones that require as much time.
10. Implement e-signatures for report cards in all school boards.



Violent Incidents

Violent incidents in Ontario schools are a significant concern, affecting students and staff.

- **88%** of P/VPs have personally witnessed violence or threats against staff.
- **87%** have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event in their school in the past three years.
- **78%** report increasing violence in their school.
- **75%** say the level of violence is interfering with learning in the classroom.

While violent incidents can stem from a variety of factors, some of those factors are present in schools, such as bullying (physical and cyber), mental health issues, inadequate social supports and resources, large class sizes and inadequate supervision. These incidents underscore the pressing need for comprehensive strategies to ensure safe learning environments for students and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.** Ensure a full complement of school staff every day.
- 12.** Enhance funding for mental health and social services in schools (counselors, Child and Youth Workers, psychologists, social workers).
- 13.** Empower P/VPs with greater authority to suspend or exclude students without excessive procedural barriers.
- 14.** Provide specialized classes and services for our students with additional needs.



Students with Special Needs

The number of students with special needs and their complexities continue to increase every year.

- P/VPs are not medical professionals and should not be expected to take on a quasi-medical role in schools.
- Many schools lack the resources to support students with special and/or complex needs.
- Some P/VPs have been tasked with regularly toileting students. While the principal has always been available to help during emergencies, it is now part of the regular day for many P/VPs to help students in the bathroom or change diapers.
- Restrictions on progressive discipline and suspensions for younger students tie the hands of P/VPs who must intervene, discipline and ensure all students are safe.
- Staffing shortages are significantly impacting school-based services such as speech and language.
- The number of students with identified exceptionalities has increased, as has the level of complexity of these needs, requiring appropriate supports and additional specialized staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.** Ensure funding for a full complement of Educational Assistants in all schools.
- 16.** Increase autism funding for early intervention and school-based supports.
- 17.** Provide funding for staff to develop specialized programs for students with special and/or complex needs.
- 18.** Increase support for managing the needs of students with special needs, particularly where restrictions on progressive discipline and suspensions for younger students create additional challenges.



Mental Health and Well-Being

There is a direct correlation between the work intensification of the P/VP role and the increasing incidents of negative mental health and well-being among P/VPs.

- **87%** of P/VPs report that their increasing workload is negatively impacting their well-being.
- **66%** have accessed mental health services due to job stress.
- **51%** report their mental health is worse this year compared to last year.
- Long-term disability files for P/VPs have increased **680%** since 2019.
- At a time when P/VPs require increased access to mental health practitioners and resources, our provincial benefits plan has been reduced, due to a lack of adequate funding from the government.

For students to be successful, staff need to be mentally healthy.

RECOMMENDATION

- 19.** Increase funding to the P/VP ONE-T Benefits Plan to ensure sufficient access to mental health practitioners and resources.



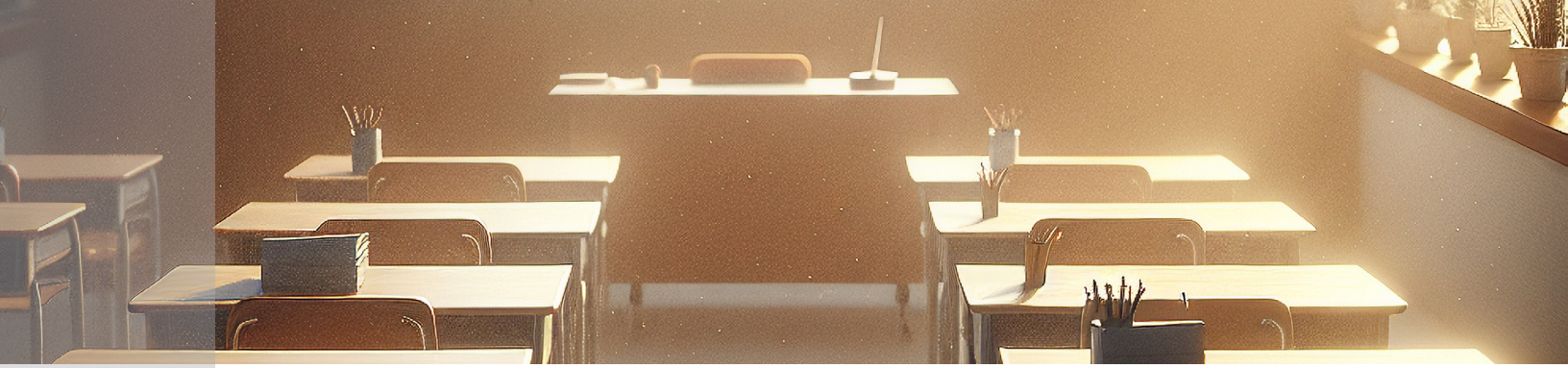
Work of Other Employee Groups

In addition to our increasingly complex, unsustainable and expanding workload, P/VPs are often tasked with completing the work of other employee groups.

- Additional duties include everything from changing diapers, riding the bus with students, cleaning and emptying garbage overflow where caretakers are unavailable or have split shifts, taking phone messages, shoveling/salting sidewalks, conducting Human Resources reference and police checks, supervising field trips and finding our own replacements when we will be away.
- P/VPs are often expected to cover the duties of Office Administrators and/or custodians during their breaks and lunches, for up to 5 hours per week, to ensure a staff member is available for emergencies.
- In some school boards, P/VPs are required to conduct/manage health and safety inspections.
- Unlike other employee groups, P/VPs are not afforded the right to disconnect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 20.** Stipulate that P/VPs are not responsible for the duties of any other employee groups.
- 21.** Staff schools appropriately, with enough caring adults to complete the work that is needed to keep schools safe.



Recruitment and Retention

Not only is the intensification of the P/VP role impacting physical and mental health, it is also directly impacting the ability of school boards to attract and retain people for the job. More and more teachers who had aspired to the role are now reconsidering, or rejecting it outright, due to the fact that it has become so unsustainable. If we cannot attract the best people to this role, none of the priorities and successes expected by the Ministry of Education and school boards will be achieved. Without a strong school leader, schools cannot thrive or succeed.

- **72%** of P/VPs can retire within five years, creating a leadership vacuum.
- Many boards have few or no prospects in the hiring pools for P/VPs.
- It is increasingly difficult to attract quality candidates to the role.
- Many P/VPs currently in the role are expressing a desire to retire early due to unsustainable demands of the job.
- Diverse identities in school leadership are greatly under-represented in comparison to school communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

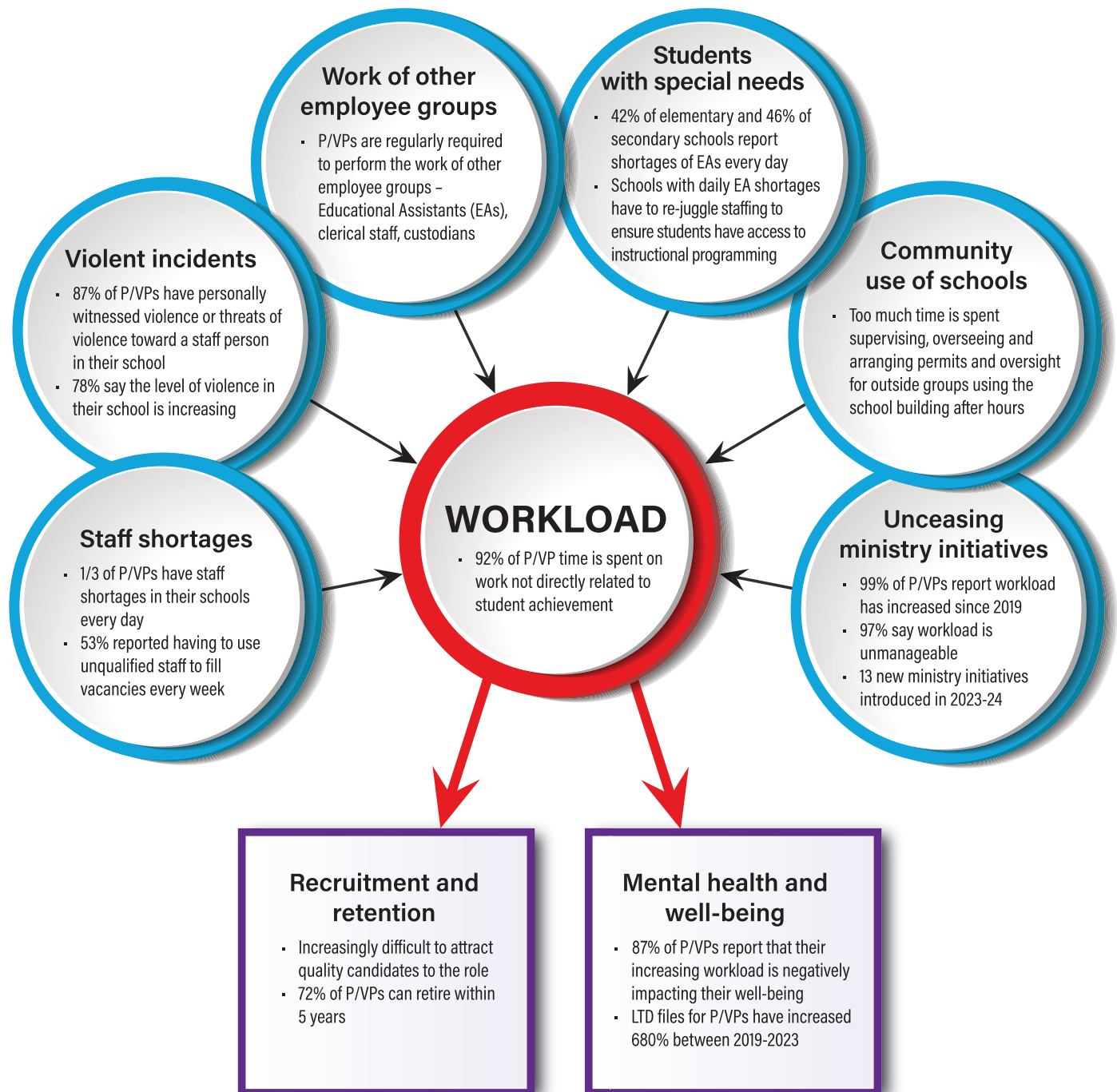
- 22.** Provide funding for mentorship and training of new P/VPs, similar to what has been offered to the teaching profession.
- 23.** Ensure a full-time administrator in every school.

Addressing the recommendations outlined above will improve the ability to attract and retain high-quality P/VPs who represent the diversity of their students, ensuring the success of Ontario's education system.

We also repeat our call for the government to conduct a comprehensive review of the education sector, in the vein of a Royal Commission, with the full partnership of all education groups, to ensure our system can meet the needs of students today and in the years to come.

The Ontario Principals' Council calls on all political parties to recognize the challenges in our system and commit to providing the funding, personnel and resources to address these challenges. Our students deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Negative Impact of Excessive Workload for Ontario's School Leaders



*Data from OPC survey in October 2023 and November 2024



Queen's Park



LIBERAL

ONTARIO
NDP  **NPD**

ONTARIO PC 

