



Statement – Assignments to Home

January 18, 2023

The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), representing more than 5,400 principals and vice-principals in Ontario's public elementary and secondary schools, has become increasingly concerned about the process used by some school boards, particularly the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), to assign administrators to home during investigations. In such circumstances, there needs to be a process in place to conduct the investigation that is fair to the administrator, timely and transparent, and not undertaken punitively.

When an alleged incident has occurred, school boards are commonly assigning a principal or vice-principal to home automatically – meaning they are relieved of their duties and not able to attend school-related events while the investigation is underway. Over the past few years, there have been more home assignments than ever before and they are lengthier (some in excess of two years), particularly in the TDSB. The way in which home assignments are communicated seems to imply overtly or by inference that the administrator is at fault, before an investigation has been conducted.

Assignments to home are occurring as a first resort, as opposed to a last one. It has become increasingly common for school boards to use this practice as a tool to respond to public/political pressure or to staff who may use the complaints process, often without considering whether it is necessary or whether the administrator could be assigned to another role or location until the investigation process has been completed.

The home assignment practice has resulted in many negative consequences.

- **The process has been unnecessarily and unfairly lengthy.** Consideration for due process often does not include estimated timelines to return administrators to work in as timely a manner as possible.
- **Assignments to home have a detrimental impact on the administrator, both personally and professionally.** They are not allowed to communicate with colleagues during this time; they receive little, if any, outreach from the board to check on them; few or no updates as to the status of the investigation are provided; efforts are not made by the board to restore the administrator's reputation post investigation where warranted; and they are not offered adequate resources to assist with the isolation and health consequences of a lengthy and difficult process. We are seeing increased incidents of physical and mental health related illness following such incidents. And anecdotally, trends indicate that the longer an administrator is assigned to home, the more difficult it is for them to successfully return.
- **In many cases, the rationale and purpose for assigning individuals to home has become unclear, at best.** Even when there is no evidence that anyone else in the school may be harmed, or no perceived threat that an administrator's ongoing presence in the school would

compromise the integrity of the investigation in any way, the home assignment continues. There are less intrusive methods available to ensure safety and preserve the integrity of the investigation, such as reassignment to another location.

It is disappointing and unfair that other employees, such as teachers, seem to be more regularly afforded the opportunity for reassignment while administrators are immediately assigned to home without considering other options.

- **Students, staff and communities are negatively impacted when a principal or vice-principal is absent from their school for a period of time.** Due to privacy concerns, no information is provided to the students or their families about the leave. The culture that each administrator brings to a school is interrupted. With ongoing staff shortages, it is increasingly difficult to find a qualified person to fill in, leaving the school without the leadership needed to create a consistent safe, caring, positive school environment.
- **The financial cost of keeping administrators at home for extended periods of time and paying for replacements is high, one that boards cannot afford with their limited budgets.** With the need to ensure taxpayer funds are being used in the classroom and directly for students, the cost is inefficient and unnecessary.

While there are times and circumstances that require an investigation, that process should not be political, unnecessarily lengthy, unfair, unsupported or arbitrary. It should be conducted as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible, respecting the administrator and the school.

Principals and vice-principals deserve respect and fairness when it comes to the investigation process. The OPC calls on school boards using this practice to

- implement options that do not include assignment to home as a first step
- cut back on the number and length of assignments to home
- develop and publish a clear process to be followed in every incidence where an administrator is assigned to home, including a directive that it only be used in the most serious cases where there is clear evidence that someone in the school may suffer harm if the staff person being investigated were to remain in the building
- prioritize these investigations for early resolution, conduct them in a timely and unbiased manner and resolve the matter as soon as the investigation is complete
- if an employee being investigated cannot remain in the school, arrange their placement in an alternative setting or role for the duration of the investigation
- provide clear communication to the school community that an assignment to home is not a presumption of guilt or wrongdoing, but a necessary step in some matters while an investigation is undertaken
- offer supports – both professional and personal – to anyone assigned to home for the duration of their leave
- where a home assignment is the only option, provide weekly updates to the administrator about the status of the investigation to ensure a fair and transparent process.