



Addressing Staff Shortages in Ontario Schools MPP Advocacy Day 2024

The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) continues to express our concerns about staff shortages in publicly funded schools, directly impacting learning, engagement, safety and well-being for students and staff. In 2023, surveys among school principals found daily shortages and unfilled positions in all employee groups.

The impact of staff shortages has resulted in many negative consequences.

- When staff are absent and cannot be replaced, principals have had to cancel or combine classes, hire unqualified adults, use parent volunteers, move Educational Assistants (EAs) to classrooms and/or cut back on supervision.
 - *32% of school leaders have staff shortages in their schools every day.*
- Schools are not as safe as they should be, as there are fewer staff and trained adults in the building.
 - *53% of principals reported having to use unqualified staff to fill vacancies every week.*
- Instruction for our most vulnerable and at-risk students is being impacted as Educational Assistants (EAs) are reassigned from special needs to general classrooms.
 - *Almost 20% of principals move EAs to classrooms to cover for absent teachers.*
- Principals and vice-principals are being directed by their boards to cover classes and supervision duties for absent staff, taking them away from their legislative responsibilities and making them unavailable to deal with safety, staffing or instructional issues that arise in other areas of the school.
- The literacy and numeracy goals of the ministry are jeopardized. Supply teachers are not getting through the curriculum or are not able to adequately prepare students for provincial assessments. The need to hire unqualified teachers to fill the gaps exacerbates the negative learning impacts.
- There are increased incidents of mental health issues, stress, burnout and illness among students and staff.
 - *A 2023 report from People for Education (P4E) reported that 91% of schools need support for students' mental health and well-being.*
 - *The P4E report noted teaching and support staff burnout, leading to higher absenteeism and increased pressure among remaining staff.*
 - *Long-term disability claims across the province tripled among public school principals and vice-principals in the past three years.*
- It is becoming more difficult to attract teachers to the role of the principal, as the increased workload to deal with daily staff shortages becomes another disincentive.
- Bus driver shortages have jeopardized students getting to school on time, or at all.
- Important work related to human rights and equity is not getting done.

Over the past several years, the Ontario government has made several announcements to assist with recruitment, training, peer support and tuition relief for several professional sectors. This includes removing tuition fees at the Ontario Police College; increasing the number of police recruits trained each year; funding peer support training, crisis intervention and mental health supports for firefighters; and providing full funding for tuition, books and other costs for nursing, paramedic or medical laboratory technologist students. Unfortunately, the education sector has not received the same supports or funding to deal with the myriad of issues we are facing in schools every day.

Short-term solutions have not resolved the problem. This crisis must be addressed immediately with practical solutions, while quickly identifying and implementing long-term and sustainable solutions. The Ministry of Education, as the key funder of the sector, and school boards, as employers, must acknowledge and work toward permanent and sustainable solutions. We urge them – again – to implement our recommendations.

- Return to a one-year Teacher College degree to move new teachers more quickly into schools.
- Minimize time between hiring and onboarding new staff.
- Provide immediate funding for additional supervision and offer paid training to non-staff adults or volunteers.
- Hire more EAs and improve their working conditions and salaries, acknowledging the critical role they play.
 - *On an average day, 66% of staff shortages are EAs.*
- Facilitate collaboration among all sector representatives to develop further recommendations.

Staff shortages continue to be an enormous daily stressor and safety challenge for school leaders, and there appears to be no end in sight. **It cannot be incumbent on principals and vice-principals alone to manage a school, maintain the integrity of programming and ensure school safety when an appropriate number of staff are not available.**

The government must step in to deal with this critical issue and provide the resources necessary to ensure classrooms and schools can operate safely, effectively and efficiently.