Principals’ Work and Well-Being in Ontario

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Dr. Fei Wang

Booklet #2
Well-Being of School Principals

PART OF A SERIES OF 4 BOOKLETS
Overview

This booklet summarizes the findings of a research survey and describes principals’ well-being along six dimensions:

- physical
- cognitive
- psychological
- emotional
- social
- spiritual

and provides evidence-informed recommendations to better support principals’ overall health and well-being.

The Respondents

2419 invited
35.6% response rate

541 elementary principals
123 secondary principals
23 middle school principals
12 K-12 principals
5 system principals
**DEMOGRAPHICS**

### Gender
- **female**: 64.2%
- **male**: 35.0%
- **prefer not to answer**: 0.7%
- **non-binary**: 0.1%

### Age
- **< 30**: 0.0%
- **30-34**: 0.3%
- **35-39**: 1.1%
- **40-44**: 10.2%
- **45-49**: 28.2%
- **50-54**: 38.2%
- **55-59**: 17.4%
- **60-64**: 3.5%
- **>65**: 1.1%

### School Location
- **A village, hamlet, or rural area** (fewer than 3,000 people): 13.5%
- **A small town** (3,000 to about 15,000 people): 11.0%
- **A town** (15,000 to about 100,000 people): 17.7%
- **A city** (100,000 to about 1,000,000 people): 39.2%
- **A large city** (Over 1,000,000 people): 17.1%
- **Other**: 1.5%

### Highest Level of Education Achieved
- **Bachelor’s Degree**: 36.4%
- **Master’s Degree**: 55.6%
- **Doctorate**: 2.0%
- **Professional Degree**: 3.7%
- **Other**: 2.4%

### Years of Experience as a Principal
- **Less than 5 years**: 31.4%
- **6-10 years**: 34.9%
- **11-15 years**: 23.5%
- **16-20 years**: 8.6%
- **Greater than 20 years**: 1.6%

**Average = 8.7 years**
Overall Well-Being

### Feelings of Overall Well-Being at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If principals felt drained by their work, this is the extent to which the following aspects of their well-being were CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:

#### Emotional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Psychological

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Physical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Social

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Cognitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Spiritual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When combining the POOR and VERY POOR feelings of principals toward each aspect of well-being, they felt the worst PHYSICALLY and the best SPIRITUALLY.

- Overall Physical Well-Being: 40.8%
- Overall Emotional Well-Being: 32.7%
- Overall Psychological Well-Being: 20.7%
- Overall Cognitive Well-Being: 15.8%
- Overall Social Well-Being: 11.3%
- Overall Spiritual Well-Being: 9.9%
Feelings of Overall Physical Well-Being at Work

- **6.9%** very poor
- **33.9%** poor
- **33.2%** neutral
- **23.8%** good
- **2.2%** excellent

When feeling drained from work, the extent to which these aspects of principals’ physical well-being were CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:

- **FITNESS**
  - **72.9%**
- **ENERGY**
  - **62.0%**
- **SLEEP**
  - **58.6%**
- **DIET**
  - **55.7%**
- **WEIGHT**
  - **48.2%**
- **STRESS-RELATED ILLNESS**
  - **38.6%**
- **PHYSICAL HEALTH**
  - **30.1%**

The extent to which work demand CONSIDERABLY or EXTREMELY affected:

- **58.3%** Doing physical activities
- **56.0%** Sleeping
- **52.1%** Eating
- **35.0%** Having headaches
- **28.6%** Having uncomfortable feelings in your stomach
Emotional Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Emotional Well-Being at Work

- 7.1% very poor
- 25.6% poor
- 30.5% neutral
- 33.6% good
- 3.1% excellent

In the week prior, how principals’ work made them feel emotionally:

If principals were feeling emotionally drained by their work, the extent to which each of the following described how they OFTEN or ALWAYS felt:

- **69.3%** I feel passionate about my work.
- **67.7%** I worry about work-related issues.
- **47.0%** I feel happy about my work.
- **44.8%** I feel satisfied about my work.
- **30.2%** I feel excited when thinking about going to work.
- **16.9%** I feel a sense of despair about my work.
Cognitive Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Cognitive Well-Being at Work

The extent to which principals felt each of the following work-related statements OFTEN or ALWAYS applied to them.

2.1% very poor

13.7% poor

30.2% neutral

47.8% good

6.2% excellent

The TOP 10 ways principals’ work made them feel cognitively in the prior week:

Disorganized (41.0%)

Forgetful (41.0%)

Focused (39.3%)

Unfocused (39.0%)

Attentive (35.5%)

Mindful (33.0%)

Delayed memory retrieval (31.0%)

Absent-minded (31.0%)

Active/quick-witted 25.5%

Indecisive (23.6%)
Social Well-Being

Feelings of Overall Social Well-Being at Work

- 1.8% very poor
- 9.5% poor
- 26.8% neutral
- 51.9% good
- 10.0% excellent

Principals OFTEN or ALWAYS:

- 71.6% felt respected at work
- 64.8% felt satisfied with work relationships
- 52.7% felt supported at work
- 12.8% felt socially excluded or left out at work

Ranking of groups principals felt they OFTEN or ALWAYS have positive relationships with:

- Students (96.4%)
- Vice-principals (92.1%)
- School support staff (88.4%)
- Administrative assistants (87.5%)
- Teachers (87.2%)
- Community leaders (83.0%)
- Parents/guardians (81.7%)
- Board office staff (71.8%)
- Superintendents (70.8%)
- Trustees (61.8%)
- Union reps (54.3%)

Note: Data was collected during labour dispute.
## Psychological Well-Being

The extent to which principals felt each of the following work-related statements OFTEN or ALWAYS applied to them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues know they can trust me</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a principal since I began the role</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I feel confident and positive about myself as a principal</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that I can trust my colleagues</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I judge myself by what I think is important to get the job done, not by what others think is important</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I work</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not afraid to voice my work opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of stakeholders</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a sense of fulfillment</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to build a work environment and a work-style for myself that is much to my liking</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy making work plans for the future</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable challenging the implicit &quot;rules of the game&quot;</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable asking for forgiveness rather than permission</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel lonely because I have few close colleagues with whom to share my concerns</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live, work one day at a time and don't really think about the future</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Feelings of Overall Psychological Well-Being at Work

- **4.6%** very poor
- **16.1%** poor
- **33.2%** neutral
- **42.4%** good
- **3.7%** excellent
### Spiritual Well-Being

#### Feelings of Overall Spiritual Well-Being at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>❗️❗️❗️❗️</td>
<td>N/A-NEVER-RARELY</td>
<td>SOMEWHAT</td>
<td>OFTEN-ALWAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>I often attend religious services to give me strength to deal with work-related issues</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>Attending religious services provides me with a sense of direction and purpose at work</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>My religious beliefs sustain me at work</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>My spiritual practice grounds me at work</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>I often resort to spiritual practice(s) to give me strength to deal with work-related issues</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>My spiritual practice provides me with a sense of direction and purpose at work</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recommendations

#### For Ministry of Education
- mandate Well-being Lead positions at the district school board level to support a comprehensive well-being program that includes principals and their schools
- expand the healthy schools initiatives to include the well-being of the school principals
- expand Ontario’s well-being Strategy for Education to include the well-being of the school principals

#### For District School Boards
- consider creating Well-being and Safety Teams to provide support and resources for principals
- designate fund and apply for grants from other agencies to work in partnership with health organizations and researchers to support principals’ well-being

#### For Professional Associations
- mobilize and align existing resources and programs from the districts, health and community organizations, and provincial and municipal governments to improve school system well-being
- explore the possibility of or expand the existing third party partnerships that focuses on wellness in public schools (e.g., STARLING Mind, IWBI, etc.)
- create well-being assessment tools to keep track of the health and well-being of their members to provide better support

#### For Principals
- cultivate individualized strategies to promote health and wellness (e.g., a personalized system dealing with emails/paperwork)
- set aside time to engage physical activities, sports, hobbies, and other individualized well-being practices
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For the full research report, visit:

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