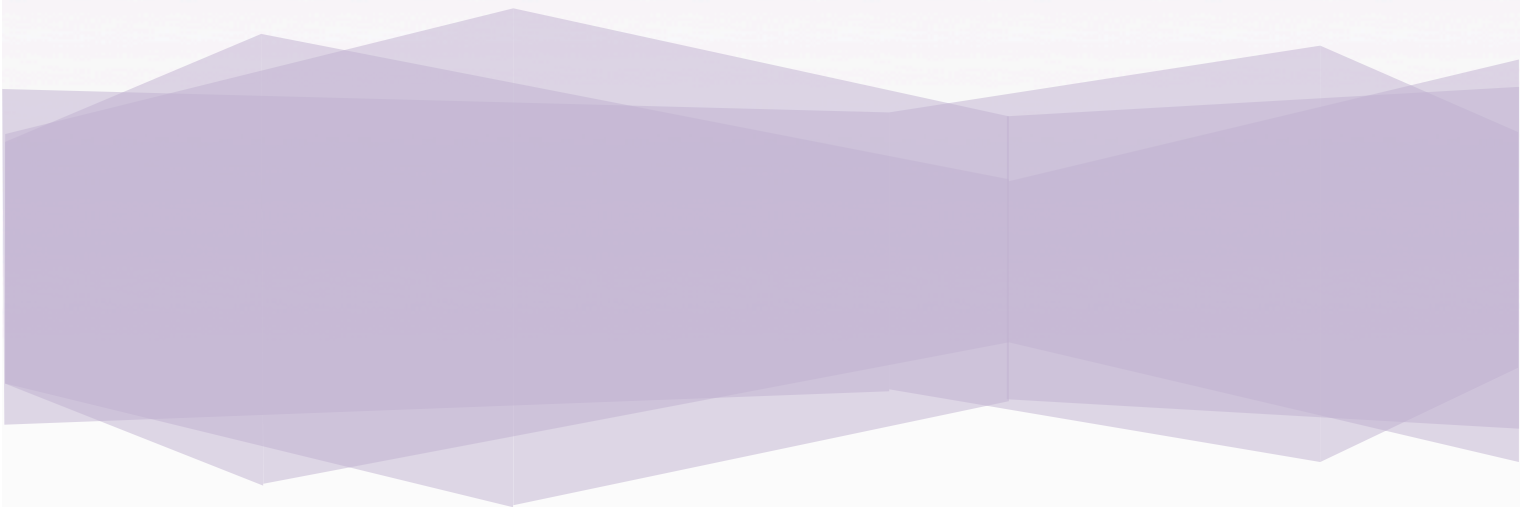


Principals' Work in Contemporary Times

Final Report, January, 2015

Dr. Katina Pollock with Cameron Hauseman



Executive Summary

The research was designed to examine how principals approach their work, spend their time, and the motivation and forces that influence their choices. It also describes the challenges and possibilities inherent in the work of principals in contemporary times. This research is guided by both the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and the concept of “work.” “Work” was defined as the practices and actions in which principals engage to fulfil their responsibilities as school principals. The OLF aims to identify effective leadership practices, guide professional learning, and support the development of school and system leaders across the province by providing practitioners with a common language and understanding of effective school leadership.

The OLF includes five leadership domains and three categories of personal leadership resources (PLRs) for principals that are linked to effective leadership. Each of the domains (Setting Directions, Building Relationships, Developing the Organization, Leading the Instructional Program, and Securing Accountability) encompasses a number of leadership practices. These practices are actions in which people or a group of people engage that reflect their circumstances and desired outcomes. The PLRs are key traits upon which leaders draw to successfully enact the practices found within each of the five domains of the OLF. Evidence suggests that cognitive (problem-solving expertise, knowledge of school and classroom conditions that directly affect student learning, and systems thinking), social (perceiving emotions, managing emotions, and acting in emotionally appropriate ways) and psychological (optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and proactivity) PLRs are also associated with effective school leadership.

This inquiry is based on interviews and school-site observations. One- to two-hour interviews were conducted with 70 school principals who were employed in seven district school boards across southwestern Ontario. School-site observations encompassed three full workdays with six principals in five different district school boards. The participating sample in this study is largely representative of the school principal population at English-speaking school district boards in southwestern Ontario:

- 42 of the 70 principals interviewed self-identified as female, with the remaining 28 self-identifying as male.
- 52 principals had been in the position for five years or more, while 18 of their colleagues had less experience.
- Most participants were employed in the elementary panel, with 13 working in a secondary school context.
- 44 participants worked in schools located in urban areas with relatively high levels of population density, while 26 of the principals interviewed worked in schools located in relatively rural settings.

A number of key findings arose from this research. In-depth detail about each of these 11 key findings is provided within this report:

- 1) *A Rewarding Career*: despite its challenges, the principalship is a rewarding career. Over 81% of principals made it clear during the interview process that they find their job rewarding and could not imagine doing anything else;
- 2) *Equity and Inclusive Education*: 55% of principals hold a broad view of student diversity that goes beyond the visible to also include invisible dimensions of diversity;
- 3) *Occupational Health and Safety*: approximately 37% of principals pointed to a substantial increase in their interactions with the provincial Ministry of Labour and time spent managing occupational health and safety at the school site;
- 4) *E-mail, Social Networking and Working Remotely*: just over 54% of principals spoke about how communicating and working virtually from their school site has made it easier to get their work done. However, 58.5% of principals identified a seemingly endless number of e-mails making them feel “on call,” as a challenge in their work;
- 5) *Unpredictable Workday*: 44% of principals indicated that their work can vary widely from one day to the next, making it very unpredictable in nature;
- 6) *Parental Engagement*: 28.5% of principals emphasized that increased parental engagement has helped to unite their school community and contributed to a positive school climate;

- 7) *Student Mental Health*: nearly two-thirds of the sample indicated that issues and situations related to student mental health provide the greatest challenges in their work;
- 8) *Perceptions of the OLF*: principals indicated having very favourable perceptions of the OLF. Forty-nine percent of principals mentioned using the OLF to plan and guide professional learning at their school, with 45% using it as a guide to organize their daily work;
- 9) *Supporting Collaboration*: over 97% of principals mentioned creating and sustaining a safe and welcoming environment for staff to offer feedback, criticism, and support to colleagues as the main strategy used to support collaboration at the school level;
- 10) *Leading the Instructional Program*: 100% of principals improve the instructional program at their school by observing instruction and offering advice and suggestions to teachers. However, 64% of principals mentioned that they would like to enact more instructional leadership at their school;
- 11) *Securing Accountability*: 41% of principals secure internal accountability through building instructional capacity at the school level. They primarily meet external accountability demands by demonstrating success in EQAO assessments and other student performance measures.

In addition to these findings, this research revealed that the OLF is closely aligned with the work of principals in the province.

Principals' Work in Contemporary Times Final Report

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Section One - Introduction

Purpose of the Study. The work of school principals is changing. Using the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) as a guide, this two-phase study proposed to provide insight into what principals do and the nature of their work. Phase one included interviews with principals, and phase two consisted of school-site observations of principals. The purpose of these phases was to examine how school principals approached their work, document how principals spent their time, explore the motivation and external factors influencing their choices, and describe the challenges and possibilities their work presented to them.

Organization. This report is divided into five sections. This introductory section outlines the purpose of the study, how the report is organized, and provides some background information and rationale for the research. The second section describes the methodology employed for the study. The third section of the report describes some of the demands and requirements of principals in Ontario. Study findings are presented in the fourth section, beginning with a short summary of the key findings of this research. The remainder of the fourth section focuses on how principals' work has changed in contemporary times, how principals spend their time, and principals' perceptions of the OLF. The findings conclude with a description of principals' daily activities, and how personal leadership resources (PLRs) are operationalized in their work. The fifth and final section offers recommendations and conclusions.

Background and Rationale for Research. In this study, the term "work" is defined as the leadership practices and actions in which principals engage to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as school principals. The literature indicates that the work of principals is changing. While the changing nature of work has been well represented in the literature and research on teaching (Adams, 2009; Belfield, 2005; Ben-Peretz, 2001; Grimmer & Echols, 2000; Hall, 2004; McGregor, Hooker, Wise, & Devlin, 2010), it has been neglected in the recent literature on principals. Yet research indicates that next to teachers, school leaders have the most influence on student learning at school (Gordon & Louis, 2009; the Institute for Education Leadership, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Michlin, Mascall, & Gordon, 2010).

Recent research reveals a number of emerging trends that hint at changes to principals' work. One of the drivers of these changes is the current wave of reforms (Ball, 2003; Court & O'Neil, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005; Harvey & Houle, 2006; Haughey, 2006; Törnsén, 2010; Wallace, 2001; Whitaker, 2003). High-stakes accountability initiatives, national and international competitiveness, and standardized curriculum (Gidney, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Pollock, 2008) have reduced principals' autonomy, and changed their work, actions, and leadership practices while creating an expectation of collaborative decision-making (Court & O'Neil, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006). Additionally, principals must be aware of, understand, and respond to the needs of increasingly diverse school communities. Issues of race, sexual orientation, and religion, among others, continue to influence principals' approaches to their work (Harvey & Houle, 2006; Ryan, 2006). Advances in technology have also affected how principals communicate and share information (Haughey, 2006). Finally, the changing nature of labour relations has altered the way in which principals interact with other educators and staff. For instance, in Ontario, the departure of principals from teachers' unions under a previous government in the late 1990s has formalized the relationship between the two groups and added a layer of complexity to collegial enterprises (Wallace, 2010).

While there is a limited understanding in the literature of what principals actually do, there is a great deal of evidence about the traits and practices associated with successful and effective educational leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) identify five research-based conclusions about effective school-level leadership. These five conclusions are:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning;
2. Other members of the school community can provide leadership, and that needs to be cultivated;
3. A core set of practices form the basis of successful leadership;
4. Effective leaders respond to challenges and opportunities inherent in working in an accountability-driven context; and
5. Effective leaders pursue opportunities and mitigate challenges that arise in educating diverse groups of students.

Responding to additional evidence, these conclusions were revised to include seven claims about effective leadership (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006). The latter two conclusions regarding effective leadership above (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) were fused together to create a claim that effective principals demonstrate responsiveness to the contexts in which they work. Three additional claims were offered by the authors (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006):

6. Principals can have a positive and significant impact on student achievement by motivating staff and offering them a positive work environment;
7. Widely distributing leadership increases its influence on both the school and students; and
8. The proportion of variations found in leadership effectiveness can be explained by a small number of personal traits, including resilience and optimism (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006), both of which are found in the revised school-level OLF.

These traits and PLRs formed the research evidence (Leithwood, 2012) that served as a foundation for the Ontario Leadership Framework.

Section Two - Methodology¹

The two phases of the study included two different research methods: interviews and school-site observations.

Data Collection Methods. Different data collection methods were employed in each phase of this study in order to explore what principals do and the nature of their work. Guided by the Ontario Leadership Framework, the first phase of the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 70 school principals from seven different district school boards in southwestern Ontario.

Interviews. Interview questions covered almost every aspect of the OLF, including each of the five domains that comprise the OLF. The interviews also dealt with PLRs, which are traits

¹ Research team included (in Alphabetical order): Asma Ahmed (UWO), Dr. Patricia Briscoe (Brock), Cameron Hauseman (OISE), Michael Mindzak (UWO), and Donna Swapp (UWO).

or dispositions that are likely to influence the effectiveness of leadership actions and practices. Principals were asked directly about setting directions, building relationships, creating collaborative cultures, leading the instructional program, and securing accountability with internal and external stakeholders. Principals were also asked how they maintained optimism about their work, as well as their strategies for problem solving. They were also asked to comment on additional areas not mentioned above. These additional questions inquired about participant demographics, changing student demographics, the impact of advancements of information-communications technology on their work, and working with various labour groups at the school site. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in *Appendix A*.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with elementary and secondary school principals in seven district school boards in southwestern Ontario. The district school boards that participated in this aspect of the research are listed below. The following list is in descending order based on the total number of principals interviewed at each of the participating district school boards:

- Greater Essex County District School Board (16);
- Thames Valley District School Board (13);
- St. Clair Catholic District School Board (11);
- London Catholic District School Board (10);
- District School Board of Niagara (10);
- Avon Maitland District School Board (6); and the
- Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (4).

Interviews were recorded using an iPad and/or digital voice recorders. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were stored in an electronic database for analysis.

School-site observations. Six school-site observations were completed with elementary and secondary school principals at five district school boards in southwestern Ontario between April and December, 2013. The district school boards that participated in the school-site observations are listed below. The following list is in descending order based on the total number of principals observed at each of the participating district school boards:

- Greater Essex County District School Board (2);

- District School Board of Niagara (1);
- Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (1);
- London Catholic District School Board (1); and the
- Thames Valley District School Board (1).

The observation procedure involved two researchers following and recording the work of a principal for three consecutive school days. One researcher documented the minute-by-minute work of participating principals in the form of qualitative field notes. These notes documented each time a unique activity occurred, the location and duration of the activity, as well as whether the principal was alone, or working with others when engaging in a given action or activity. Another member of the research team was simultaneously collecting quantitative data on principals' work using an iPad connected to an online survey tool. Content in the quantitative observation tool was derived from the OLF, as was the interview protocol. The quantitative observation tool included opportunities to document each time a principal applied an aspect of the OLF to their work.

A total of 442 timed observations occurred across the six school sites with over 965 observations recorded in total at these observation times.

Sampling. A number of strategies were used to generate the sample of principals interviewed for this study. To begin, each participating district school board sent an official invitational e-mail to all active principals in their district. This method of recruitment provided a limited number of participants; some districts initially had better response rates than others. Next, supervisory officers from each board were asked to identify and invite principals working in a range of contexts to participate in the study. Seventeen principals contacted during this stage of the recruitment process declined the opportunity to participate. Elements of both snowball and convenience sampling strategies were used to populate the dataset during the latter stages of data collection as participants identified colleagues they thought might be interested in participating. The last recruitment effort included getting permission to e-mail principals directly rather than going through the district office. Boards contacted agreed to allow the research team to e-mail principals directly. Principals recruited for the research in this manner were asked to self-select by sending a positive response to the e-mail invitation

sent to them by the research team. The greatest number of participants were engaged using direct e-mail invitations sent to all elementary and secondary school principals in five participating district schools boards.

The research team employed purposive sampling to compile the sample of principals who participated in the school-site observations. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they would be willing to be observed by two members of the research team for three consecutive workdays. A list of participating principals willing to be observed was compiled throughout the interview process. As demonstrated in the remainder of this section, the research team selected a broad range of principals working in a variety of settings to illustrate the ways in which community context shapes how principals apply the OLF to their work. Efforts were made to observe at least one principal from each of the district school boards that participated in the study. The research team also tried to observe principals with varied levels of experience and to ensure that the observation sample had representation among the genders and the elementary and secondary panels.

Description of the Sample. Ontario principals work in a number of different contexts and come to the position with diverse levels of experience. What follows is a description of the sample recruited to participate in the research. The characteristics of the 70 principals who were interviewed are described first. This is followed by a description of the characteristics of the six principals who participated in the school-site observations.

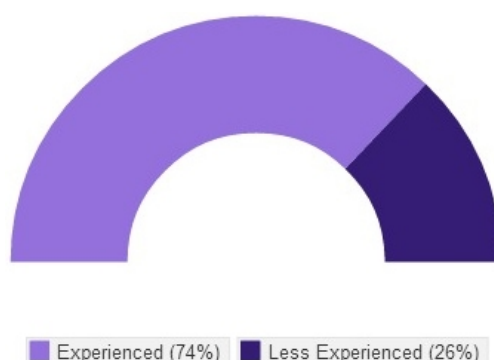
Interview sample. Information regarding the characteristics of the principals interviewed can be found in Table 1: Participant Characteristics.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics - Interviews

District	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Elementary	Secondary	EX	LE	Total
AVDSB	2	4	2	4	5	1	6	0	6
GECSB	8	8	13	3	13	3	12	4	16
HPCDSB	1	3	0	4	4	0	2	2	4
LCDSB	3	7	7	3	8	2	8	2	10
DSBN	5	5	6	4	8	2	6	4	10
StCDSB	4	7	4	7	10	1	8	3	11
TVDSB	5	8	12	1	9	4	10	3	13
Total	28	42	44	26	57	13	52	18	70

Legend: EX = Experienced (>5 years); LE = Less Experienced (<5 years)

Between 4 and 16 principals at each of the respective district school boards participated in the study. Principals were considered “experienced” if they indicated having been in the position for at least five years. Otherwise, they were categorized as being “less experienced.” Of the 70 principals interviewed, 52 had at least five years of experience, while 18 were relatively new to the principalship.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Experienced and Less Experienced Principals**

Fifty-seven of the 70 participants were employed in the elementary panel, with 13 working in secondary schools. The ratio of elementary to secondary principals in Ontario is approximately 4:1; the sample in this study is just under this ratio.

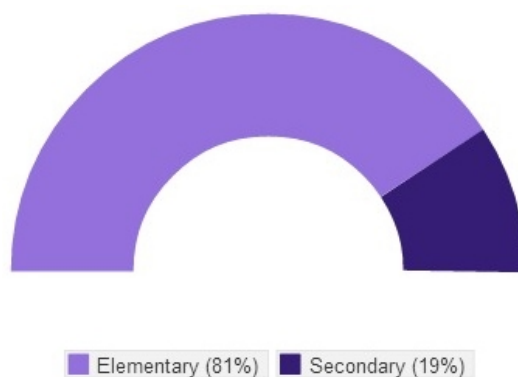


Figure 2: Percentage of Principals in the Elementary and Secondary Panels

In terms of gender, 28 of the 70 principals interviewed self-identified as male, with the remaining 42 self-identifying as female.

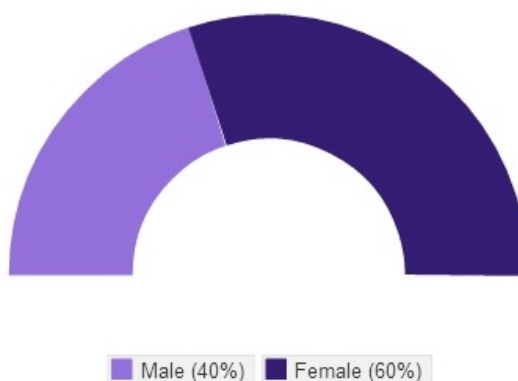


Figure 3: Percentage of Female and Male Principals

Forty-four participants worked in schools located in urban areas with relatively high levels of population density, while 26 principals interviewed worked in schools located in rural settings.

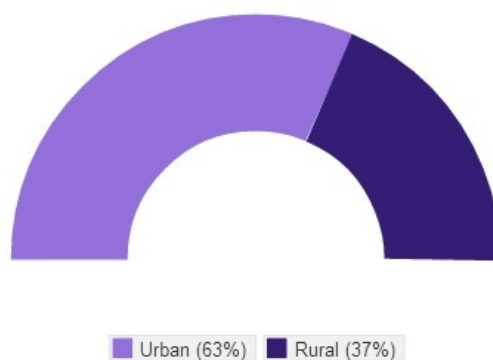


Figure 4: Percentage of Urban and Rural Principals

Observation sample. Similar to the interview sample, the gender, elementary/secondary, population density of the area surrounding the school, and level of experience were recorded for each principal who participated in the school-site observations. These characteristics are summarized in Table 2, shown below.

Table 2: Participant Characteristics - Observations

Board	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Elementary	Secondary	EX	LE	Total
AVDSB									
GECD SB	2		1	1	2		1	1	2
HPCD SB		1		1	1		1		1
LCDSB	1		1			1	1		1
DSBN		1	1		1			1	1
StCDSB									
TVDSB	1		1			1	1		1
Total	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	6

Legend: EX = Experienced (>5 years); LE = Less Experienced (<5 years)

Six school-site observations were conducted in five of the seven district school boards that participated in this study. A small number of interview participants agreed to participate in the observation phase of this research. As such, the number of male and female principals observed does not reflect the proportion of these genders in the total interview sample. In order to observe principals' work in a broad range of schools (elementary/secondary panel, school size, size of the surrounding community, socio-economic status of the surrounding community, etc.) and gather data from principals with different levels of experience, it proved necessary to observe four male principals and two female principals in this phase of the study. Two of the school-site observations occurred in schools located in rural areas with relatively low population density, while four took place in urban areas. Four of the participating principals work in the elementary panel, and two are employed in secondary schools. Of the six principals observed, four had at least five years of experience, while two were relatively new to the principalship.

Data Analysis. The OLF was used to both guide this research and frame the analysis. Categories and a coding key based on the research questions and the five domains and 21 leadership practices in the OLF were developed prior to the analysis phase. Additional categories were developed as additional themes emerged from the data.

An interactive, web-based, qualitative, and mixed methods data analysis software application called Dedoose was used to code and analyze the interviews in this study. The web-based nature of the program enabled researchers to access the research from any device that connects to the Internet, including computers running Windows or Apple operating systems, tablets, and mobile phones, all of which were used to analyze data on this project. Project documents were kept in “cloud” storage once uploaded to the Dedoose online database. Dedoose allowed researchers located in different cities to simultaneously log into the project and upload documents, code data, and conduct analysis in real-time.

Section Three - Demands and Requirements of Principals

In order to provide context for the findings presented in this study, principals’ legal roles and responsibilities as outlined in the Ontario *Education Act* are described in this section. The work of the principal in Ontario’s publicly-funded school system is presented in terms of what principals are responsible for, the authority tied to the position, and the specific duties they perform. Rather than acting as a guide to inform practice, the legislation only points to the duties that principals are legislated to perform and does not offer suggestions for practice. In terms of their legislated responsibilities, section 265 of Ontario’s *Education Act* (*Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.2) describes the powers and duties mandated of principals in Ontario. Principals’ duties fall into the following three broad categories: leading the instructional program at their school, managing the school organization, and ensuring the health and safety of all staff and students in the school. In terms of instruction, Ontario principals are responsible for being the instructional leaders, which includes but is not limited to promoting students, developing a plan for co-curricular activities, and ensuring that the school has approved all textbooks. The Ontario *Education Act* (*Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.2) also points to a number of organizational management-related actions within a principal’s legal portfolio. These include registering students, recording attendance, maintaining and curating student records, and reporting student progress to parents/guardians. Principals are legally obligated to consult with the school council at least once per year and to prepare reports on matters of interest to the school. They are also legally responsible for the health and safety of all students

within the school. This includes refusing to admit anyone into the school who may have a communicable disease, enforcing occupational health and safety protocols, maintaining the physical plant, and creating a safe and welcoming school climate for all stakeholders.

Principals' work in Ontario is also influenced by policies, legislation, strategies, initiatives, and amendments to the provincial *Education Act*. A sampling of policies, strategies, and initiatives that influence the work of principals in Ontario can be found below:

- Aboriginal Education Strategy;
- Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy;
- Fluctuating Enrolment/School Closures (ARC);
- Parents in Partnership: Parent Engagement Policy; and the
- Urban Priority High Schools (UPHS) Initiative

The following policy documents also influence the work of Ontario's principals:

- First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) Policy Framework;
- *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools*; and the
- *Ontario Curriculum*.

Though the *Education Act* is the primary piece of legislation driving principals' work in Ontario, it is important to mention that principal practice in the province is also informed and influenced by a number of different policies and legislation. According to the Ontario College of Teachers (2009), principals in Ontario are expected to have a working knowledge of at least 17 different pieces of provincial and federal legislation in addition to the *Education Act* (*Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.2). This list has been updated to reflect recent legislative changes and includes the following pieces of legislation:

- *Bill 115 - Putting Students First Act (now repealed)*
- *Bill 13 - Accepting Schools Act*
- *Bill 212 - Progressive Discipline and School Safety*
- *Child and Family Services Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. C-11.*
- *Children's Law Reform Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. C-12.*
- *Divorce Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. 3 (2nd supp.).*
- *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, S.O., 1996, c. 11.*

- *Employment Standards Act, S.O., 2000, c. 41.*
- *Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, S.O., 2010, c. 10.*
- *Human Rights Code, R.S.O., 1990, c. H-19.*
- *Immunization of School Pupils Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. C - I.1.*
- *Indian Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5.*
- *Labour Relations Act, S.O., 1995, c. 1.*
- *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. M-56.*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. O-1.*
- *Occupier's Liability Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. O-2.*
- *Ontario College of Teachers Act, S.O., 1996, c. 12. (and regulations made under the Act)*
- *Regulation 274/12*
- *Sabrina's Law, S.O., 2005, c. 7.*
- *Safe Schools Act, S.O., 2000, c. 12.*
- *Teaching Profession Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. T-2.*
- *Trespass to Property Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. T-21.*
- *Young Offenders Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. Y-1. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009).*

These pieces of legislation are derived from many different sectors, including health and law, in addition to education. The complex nature of principals' work is demonstrated by both the variety of legislation that must be managed by those who occupy the position, as well as the amount of legislation that influences the duties, actions, and practices they perform daily.

The OLF is a fundamental pillar of the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). The OLS is a long-term, systematic initiative of the Ministry of Education designed to improve the quality of leadership across the whole of the province's publicly-funded education system. The goals of the OLS are to find, develop, and retain the right people; namely, passionate educators with the necessary skills and qualifications to lead the province and its students forward. Initially introduced in 2006, the OLF is a working document that was revised in 2012, and most recently in 2013 to reflect the latest research and includes leadership practices specific for system leaders. It was designed with many purposes in mind, including the facilitation of a shared vision of leadership across Ontario's publicly-funded school system.

The OLF is designed to:

- 1) Facilitate a shared vision of leadership in schools and districts;
- 2) Promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and
- 3) what it means to be a school or system leader;
- 4) Identify the practices, actions, and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership;
- 5) Guide the design and implementation of professional learning and development for school and system leaders;
- 6) Identify the characteristics of highly performing schools and systems – K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and District Effectiveness Framework (DEF); and
- 7) Aid in the recruitment, development, selection and retention of school and system leaders (Institute for Education Leadership, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, the OLF highlights a number of evidence-based practices for leadership. It provides current and aspiring school-level leaders an opportunity to both increase their leadership capacity and grow in their respective roles by attending to the 21 practices organized into five interrelated domains and a set of PLRs that are linked with effective leadership. Each of the domains (Setting Directions, Building Relationships, Developing the Organization, Leading the instructional Program, and Securing Accountability) encompasses a number of practices. These leadership practices are actions in which people or a group of people engage that reflect both their circumstances and their desired outcomes. The OLF also contains a set of PLRs, which are key traits upon which leaders draw to enact the leadership practices mentioned earlier. Evidence suggests that cognitive (problem-solving expertise, knowledge of school and classroom conditions that directly affect student learning, and systems thinking), social (perceiving emotions, managing emotions, and acting in emotionally appropriate ways) and psychological (optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and proactivity) PLRs are associated with effective school leadership.

Section Four - Findings

This section begins with a short summary of the key findings of this research. The remainder of this section discusses, in order:

- Principals' perceptions of the role;
- The changing nature of principals' work;
- How principals spent their time;
- Areas where principals would like to be more involved;
- How the PLRs are evident in principals' work;;
- How principals' work aligns with the OLF; and
- How principals operationalize the leadership practices in their daily work and how they draw on the PLRs to successfully enact those leadership practices.

While other findings are included in the following sections, 11 key findings arose from this research. Each of these findings is highlighted below, and also expanded upon throughout the remaining sections of this report. The key findings are:

- 1) *A Rewarding Career*: despite its challenges, the principalship is a rewarding career. Over 81% of principals made it clear during the interview process that they find their job rewarding and could not imagine doing anything else;
- 2) *Equity and Inclusive Education*: 55% of principals hold a broad view of student diversity that goes beyond the visible to also include invisible dimensions of diversity;
- 3) *Occupational Health and Safety*: approximately 37% of principals pointed to a substantial increase in their interactions with the provincial Ministry of Labour and time spent managing occupational health and safety at the school site;
- 4) *E-mail, Social Networking, and Working Remotely*: just over 54% of principals spoke about how communicating and working virtually from their school site has made it easier to get their work done. However, 58.5% of principals identified a seemingly endless number of e-mails making them feel "on call," as a challenge in their work;
- 5) *Unpredictable Workday*: 44% of principals interviewed indicated that their work can vary widely from one day to the next making it very unpredictable in nature;

- 6) *Parental Engagement*: 28.5% of principals emphasized that increased parental engagement has helped to unite their school community and contributed to a positive school climate;
- 7) *Student Mental Health*: nearly two-thirds of the sample indicated that issues and situations related to student mental health provide the greatest challenges in their work;
- 8) *Perceptions of the OLF*: principals indicated having very favourable perceptions of the OLF. Forty-nine percent of principals mentioned using the OLF to plan and guide professional learning at their school, with more than 45% using it as a guide to organize their daily work;
- 9) *Supporting Collaboration*: over 97% of principals mentioned creating and sustaining a safe and accepting environment for staff to offer feedback and support to colleagues as the main strategy used to support collaboration at the school level;
- 10) *Leading the Instructional Program*: 100% of principals improve the instructional program at their school by observing instruction and offering advice and suggestions to teachers. Principals also mentioned using and analysing data to monitor student progress. However, 64% of principals mentioned that they would like to engage in more instructional leadership at their school;
- 11) *Securing Accountability*: over 40% of principals secure internal accountability through building instructional capacity at the school level, and primarily meet external accountability demands by demonstrating success in EQAO assessments and other student performance measures.

Principals' Perceptions of their Work. Although principals' work can be challenging, there is evidence from this research to suggest that being a school principal is also fulfilling. Despite mentioning the challenges and competing priorities faced on a daily basis, early in the interview process one elementary principal mentioned: "...as hectic as this job is, as demanding as this job is, it is one of the best jobs in the world." This sentiment was repeated again and again as 81% of principals made it clear during the interview process that they enjoy their job and "could not imagine doing anything else."

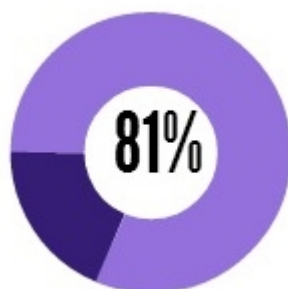


Figure 5: Percentage of Principals who Enjoy their Job

Principals appeared to be positive and devoted to their position as a result of a number of intrinsic and extrinsic benefits associated with it. Fair and reasonable remuneration, participation in professional learning and skill development opportunities, and involvement in policy and programming by sitting on various committees (through their district school boards, professional associations, and other bodies) were among the extrinsic benefits principals attached to their position. Principals also spoke of many intrinsic benefits tied to their position. Typifying these attitudes, one secondary school principal described the principalship as being “...a very rewarding career. I like doing what I do and I like helping students... I like making a difference in the lives of students.” Many intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, mentioned by over 81% of principals interviewed, revolved around the opportunity to facilitate learning and be involved in the lives of students; this was a strong theme in the interview data.

Only 8.6% of the sample, all of whom are experienced principals, indicated feeling less secure in their job since being removed from the teachers’ union. However, It is important to note that this finding is limited to a small group who were already in the position when principals and vice-principals were removed from the provincial teaching unions. No other principals who participated in the interviews or observations expressed anxiety concerning job security.

The Changing Nature of Principals’ Work. A number of recent changes to the educational landscape in Ontario have altered the work of principals. This section focuses on findings related to how principals’ work has changed and is organized under the following sub-sections:

- demographics;

- expectations;
- collaboration;
- occupational health and safety;
- information and communications technology;
- the unpredictable nature of the work;
- parental engagement; and
- mental health and well-being.

Demographics. Principals indicated that two demographic changes have impacted their work. These changes are increased student diversity and declining enrolments. The following sections discuss the impact of each of these changes on principals' work.

Diversity. In terms of diversity and inclusive education, it appears Ontario principals are at different stages of understanding. Approximately 57% of principals hold a broad view of student diversity that goes beyond visible diversity to also include invisible dimensions of diversity. Principals indicated that there are a host of factors besides visible forms of diversity, such as socio-economic status, student mental health, as well as different learning styles or abilities that have led to changes in work at the school site. As one secondary school principal indicated: "Mental health and socio-economic status... those make us diverse." However, 28.5% of principals continue to mainly view diversity in terms of visible diversity.

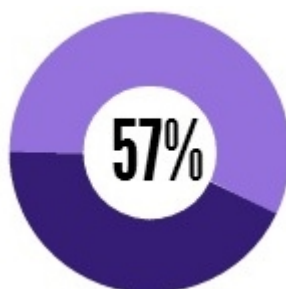


Figure 6: Percentage of Principals who have a Broad View of Student Diversity

An increased awareness of equity and inclusive education/diversity, in all its dimensions, has influenced how principals do their work. For instance, developing an awareness of diversity at school was mentioned as a change in principals' work by 16 interviewees; this represents over 22% of principals who participated in this research. An additional 15% of principals expressed similar sentiments, but suggested that rather than simply promoting an awareness of

diversity, their role was to “celebrate” diversity at the school level. Principals with access to interpreters and translation services indicated that these were valuable resources used to communicate with newcomer students and parents.

Ontario’s publicly-funded school system serves students from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. With schools increasingly being viewed as sites where the impact of societal inequities can be reduced, initiatives and programs targeting societal inequities are having an impact on principals and their work. Urban principals passionately described providing students and their families with food and other essentials. One elementary school principal described this as a key responsibility, while noting that the school is tasked with “providing the basics for some families; whether it be Health Unit support for head lice, or clothing or Christmas presents, those sorts of things.” It is important to note that purchases such as those listed above can place a strain on school budgets. However, principals interviewed had absolutely no reservations about re-allocating school funds, fundraising money, or drawing from their personal accounts to ensure that students at their school had access to basic necessities, such as nutritious food.

Principals identified two diversity-related challenges in their work. The first challenge involved trying to create a welcoming school climate in order to engage newcomer students and families who may have a limited understanding of both the English language and Canadian social norms and values associated with publicly-funded schooling. Among principals who identified engaging newcomer families as a challenge, those who reported having successfully addressed the issue highlighted the importance of maintaining patience with the process and making sustained and continued efforts to engage newcomers. Strategies mentioned included working with parents to support children in the home, and encouraging participation in school-based activities. Such efforts are vital for expanding the school’s reach in the community, although the latter was identified as taking time to plan and organize.

The second diversity-related challenge faced by Ontario principals involved receiving a great deal of “push-back” from their respective school communities. Principals indicated that some school communities pushed back against decisions to host “holiday” events that were inclusive and welcoming to all stakeholders rather than celebrating specific religious

observances. In attempting to mitigate this challenge, principals reported drawing on prior relationships with stakeholders who voiced displeasure, as well as on their active listening and problem-solving skills. While these strategies worked for most participants who cited this challenge, two principals did indicate having to “stand firm” with some stakeholders.

Declining enrolments. Declining enrolments are a recent demographic change that has led to changes in the work of 14% of the principals who participated in this research. Principals reported that in situations involving declining enrolments, staff members were often extremely concerned about job security. For instance, one secondary school principal mentioned: “...people are getting laid off. There are a lot of good people out there I wish I could hire.” Impending layoffs can create difficulties in building and sustaining a healthy and positive school climate. Principals indicated that they relied on their PLRs - particularly resilience - and acting in emotionally appropriate ways when dealing with these difficult situations with staff.

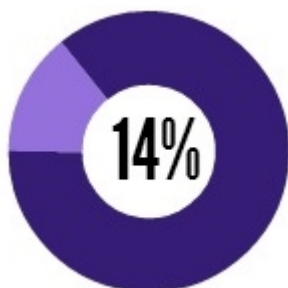


Figure 7: Percentage of Principals who View Declining Enrolments as a Challenge

Principals took two proactive steps to respond to challenges related to declining enrolment. The first strategy involved seeking out or expanding special programs to ensure that the school would maintain a stable enrolment in the short and medium terms. More applicable to secondary school contexts, the second strategy involved principals making active efforts to recruit students to attend their schools. The principals who mentioned employing the second strategy also indicated placing more emphasis on student recruitment than they had in the recent past because they were competing with other district school boards in their region to increase enrolment numbers. An experienced principal in the secondary panel noted: “...declining enrolment is hitting secondary schools overall, so it is partly that. We’ve also worked very hard to recruit grade 8 students and have increased that number by 10%, but we still have a ways to go.”

Expectations. An increase of expectations placed on principals by multiple stakeholders represents a recent change that has had a significant impact on their work. This point was driven home by many participants, including an elementary school principal who mentioned:

...expectations from the staff, there are expectations from the kids, there are expectations from the community, there are expectations from the board, and from the ministry. We have a number of stakeholders that we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis, so finding the time to meet the needs of all of them is very challenging. But I always replace the word 'challenge' with 'opportunity.'

As demonstrated by the quote above, principals specifically mentioned dealing with increased expectations from the Ministry of Education, their district school board, parents, staff, and expectations of themselves; each of these is discussed in the following sections.

Ministry/district expectations. Principals indicated that they faced increased expectations from both their district school boards and the Ministry of Education. A total of 39% of the principals in the sample stated outright that because of previously legislated demands, they simply did not have enough time in the day to attend to any additional responsibilities and other aspects of their job at full capacity.

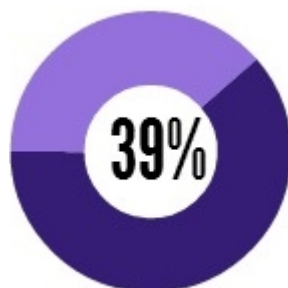


Figure 8: Percentage of Principals who Found Ministry/Board Expectations Challenging in their Work

Similarly, 17% of principals mentioned suffering from “initiative fatigue.” Most principals suffering from initiative fatigue indicated that they often delegate responsibility for either whole programs or aspects of initiatives to staff who have an interest in gaining leadership experience.

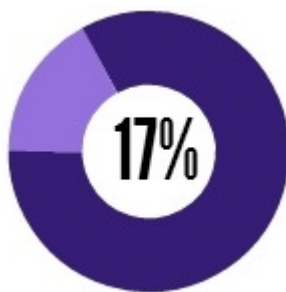


Figure 9: Percentage of Principals Suffering from Initiative Fatigue

It can be difficult for principals to generate ownership from staff regarding initiatives that appear not to be directly tied to student achievement. Mandatory daily physical activity in elementary schools was a prime example of one such initiative wherein some principals did not see that connection. Principals responded to this challenge by emphasizing a focus on instruction and ensuring that all aspects of their programs concentrate on student learning. For instance, 31% of principals mentioned implementing procedures for responding to initiatives from outside of the school and ensuring that teachers did not feel “overloaded.”

Parental expectations. During the interviews, 33% of the sample mentioned that increased parental expectations have created additional challenges in their work. Seventeen interviewees indicated that there is a lack of respect for the authority vested in the principalship and an overall lack of respect for their professional expertise and judgement on the part of some parents. Principals seemed to rely on elements of their cognitive, social, and psychological PLRs to mitigate challenges regarding difficult parents with demanding expectations. Examples of principals drawing on PLRs included using problem-solving expertise to get to the root of an issue while simultaneously perceiving the emotions of the parent and concurrently managing their own emotions. Principals also mentioned the benefits of staying resilient when faced with emotionally difficult situations.

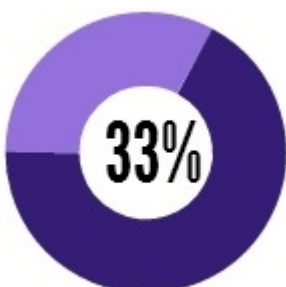


Figure 10: Percentage of Principals who Find Increased Parental Expectations Challenging

Staff expectations. Nineteen percent of principals believed their staff do not fully understanding the difficulties and the all-encompassing nature of the principalship. When managing staff expectations, principals reported relying on their self-efficacy and their ability to manage their own emotions and act in emotionally appropriate ways.

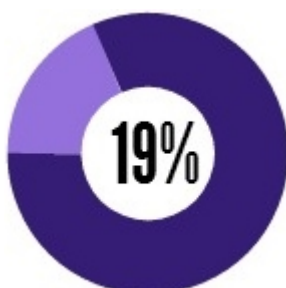


Figure 11: Percentage of Principals who Find Staff Expectations Challenging

Collaboration. All of the principals included in this study mentioned that a major change in their work has been an increased focus on collaboration. Most principals (77%) discussed ways they try to build a collaborative culture in their school. They indicated taking a slow and steady approach to teacher development, spoke of the importance of modelling collaboration, and of fostering a feeling of mutual respect amongst staff.

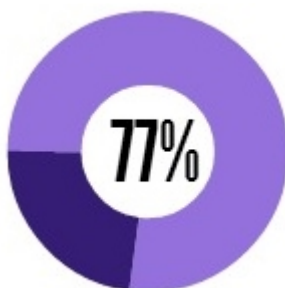


Figure 12: Percentage of Principals who Discussed Building a Collaborative Culture at their School

Occupational Health and Safety. Thirty-seven percent of principals pointed to a substantial increase in their interactions with the provincial Ministry of Labour and time spent managing occupational health and safety at the school site. Principals are now responsible for enforcing policy in this area, reinforcing a culture of safety-mindedness, modelling proper occupational health and safety procedures (e.g., changing into approved footwear when entering designated areas of the school), delivering ladder safety sessions, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training, and other occupational health and safety-specific professional development sessions to staff.

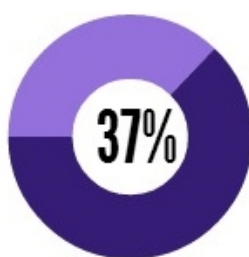


Figure 13: Percentage of Principals who Indicated Increases in interactions with the Ministry of Labour

A key challenge created by the addition of occupational health and safety concerns to principals' work is that it adds another responsibility that pulls them away from being an instructional leader. Apart from attending to the occupational health and safety responsibilities mentioned earlier, principals respond to this challenge by using the development sessions as an opportunity to build collaboration and camaraderie amongst staff.

E-mail, Social Networking, and Working Remotely. The increase in the use of e-mail, social networking, and working remotely are recent changes that have a profound impact on contemporary principals' work. However, the findings related to this change are conflicting. When asked about how changes in the prevalence and use of information and communications technology have changed their work, 54% of principals spoke about how communicating and working virtually from their school site has made it easier to get their work done.

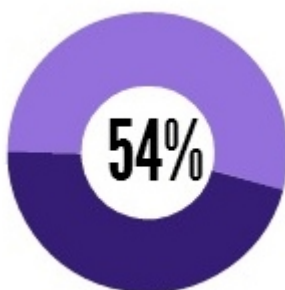


Figure 14: Percentage of Principals who View E-mail, Social Networking, and Working Remotely as Positive Developments in their Work

However, 58.5% of principals identified a seemingly endless barrage of e-mail as a challenge in their daily work. This second group of principals felt overwhelmed with the amount of e-mail they received on a daily basis, and argued that technology has increased, not reduced, the amount of paperwork they are tasked with completing. One of the elementary school principals interviewed mentioned:

You are available every minute of the day. On a typical day I will receive 40 e-mails that are important. I will receive other ones, but I will probably receive 30 to 40 that would require me to respond.

Approximately 49% of principals also mentioned technological changes in the way people communicate as challenging because they feel like they are always “on call.” Principals described technology increasing the scope and volume of their work, making them feel as though they were unable to get away from their job.

Both principals who perceived the increased use of e-mail and social networking in their work and the ability to work remotely as positive developments and those who viewed the developments negatively responded to the issue in a similar manner: principals have changed the way they structure their day and how they assign support staff. Based on personal preference, some principals mentioned reading and responding to e-mail using a remote connection on their laptops or cell phones to save time for instructional leadership activities when present at the school site. Other principals indicated that they preferred to arrive at school early or stay late in an effort to catch up on any digital communications missed throughout the day. Principals also reported having staff assist them in compiling data or preparing documents when facing urgent deadlines.

Two additional challenges regarding changes in e-mail, social networking, and working remotely emerged from the interviews. While just under 25% of principals discussed the potentially positive effects that classroom technology can have on student engagement, eight principals indicated that cyber-bullying through social media and students carrying cell phones and other communication devices in the classroom can lead to concerns. Some participants believed that cyber-bullying and cell phones hinder student learning and interfere with the promotion and maintenance of a healthy school climate. Principals were adamant about providing a safe and welcoming environment for all by advocating for students and other members of the school community to speak up when they witnessed bullying. This included ensuring that the student population and their parents are familiar with the Ministry of Education's definition of bullying through assemblies, and handouts, and newsletters sent home to parents. Principals also mentioned placing an anonymous reporting link on the school website. This allowed anyone in the school community to anonymously report any safety issues at or around the school, including bullying, cyber-bullying, and unsafe school facilities.

Eleven experienced principals spoke of challenges related to the learning curve involved in using their cell phones, time spent writing e-mails, and other efficiency concerns regarding the use of information and communications technology.

Unpredictable Workday. The increasing unpredictability associated with the nature of the tasks, actions, and activities they perform daily has influenced principals' work in contemporary times.

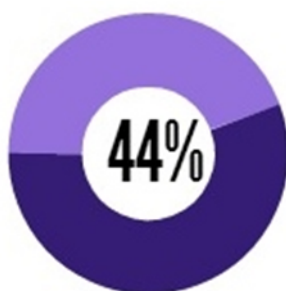


Figure 15: Percentage of Principals who Reported that their Work was Unpredictable in Nature

A total of 44% of principals said the nature of their work can vary widely from one day to the next. Further, 40% of the interview sample mentioned that the unpredictable nature of the principalship is a challenge because principals are routinely presented with unplanned

questions and events that require in-the-moment problem solving. Such questions and events can create challenging situations where advanced planning is difficult, as unplanned events take up a large portion of principals' time on a daily basis. One elementary school principal highlighted this challenge by saying: "I wake up every day and have no idea what I am walking into." Due to the unpredictable nature of their work, principals stressed the importance of being organized and relying on staff to "pick up the ball" when forced to manage unforeseen situations which required quick decisions from leadership, such as an emergency. Principals also stressed the importance of self-efficacy, and a confidence in their ability to learn new things and solve new problems as vital to their success in dealing with the unpredictable nature of their work. Most principals reported a confidence in their ability to overcome the challenge of the unpredictability of their workday with support from staff and stakeholders in the school community.

Parental Engagement. Twenty-nine percent of principals emphasized that increases in parental engagement has helped to unite their school community and contributed to a more positive school climate.

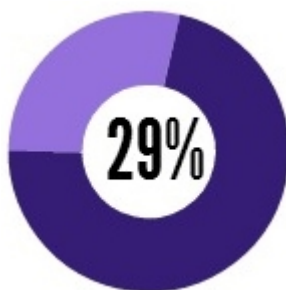


Figure 16: Percentage of Principals who View Increased Parental Engagement has United their School Community and Contributed to a More Positive School Climate

However, just over 24% of principals discussed how engaging parents has been a challenge in their work. Reasons why parental engagement has been challenging included transportation issues in rural locations, language and cultural barriers, and a lack of involvement in the home due to community attitudes about the importance of schooling. Holding multiple parent nights, encouraging attendance at school council meetings, and having teachers reach out to parents were strategies used by principals to increase parent engagement. Principals located in rural communities mentioned arranging for a school bus to

transport parents to the school to participate in parent-teacher interviews, parent nights, and other important events.

Mental Health and Well-being. Before moving forward, it is important to note that our understanding of “student mental health” is consistent with the definition of “mental health” used by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013). The WHO (2013) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

All principals interviewed for this study cited changes in mental health and well-being (either in students, teachers, or themselves) as impacting their daily work.

Student mental health. Student mental health was mentioned by 64% of principals in the sample as the single greatest challenge faced in their work, because students are coming to school with greater needs than in the past. It appears that the vast majority of principals are aware and knowledgeable when it comes to student mental health, but they do not always have the expertise to support these students at the school site. One elementary school principal echoed this by pointing out: “...there are mental health workshops, but they do not change the needs within your own building... the needs of your students still come at you regardless.” Though supports are available, they may not be sufficient in providing principals with the knowledge necessary to manage mental health concerns in an efficient manner. Further, principals in rural areas indicated that they lack access to a sufficient number of dedicated staff (e.g., child and youth workers, educational assistants, etc.) to manage student mental health in a proactive manner.

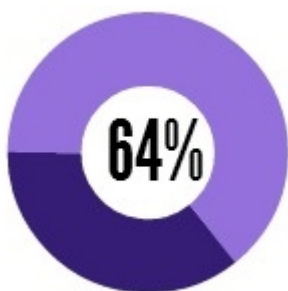


Figure 17: Percentage of Principals who Cited Challenges around Student Mental Health

Principals indicated that managing mental health issues could put a strain on time needed for other issues. Principals said they needed to draw on their resiliency and remind themselves to maintain patience with the process. While some mental health concerns do not necessarily have solutions, principals pointed to relying on their own resilience, as well as the patience and expertise of their respective staff members, to best support the mental health and well-being of all students at the school.

Staff mental health. Five principals mentioned that they have faced changes in their work regarding the mental health and well-being of their staff. Principals mentioned acting in emotionally appropriate ways when directing staff going through crises to the appropriate supports. Making increased efforts to create and sustain a positive work environment was another strategy used by principals to support the mental health and well-being of their staff.

Principals' mental health. Thirty-four of the seventy principals interviewed (49%) pointed out that it is challenging to be concerned about their own mental health and well-being while simultaneously leading and managing a school. Principals are often so committed to their jobs and the community they serve that they sacrifice their short-term happiness and well-being for those of their staff and students. Examples of this behaviour include routinely not taking a lunch, working long hours, and spending time at work instead of seeing friends and family. The emotional toll that comes as a result of this behaviour can have an impact on principals' mental health.

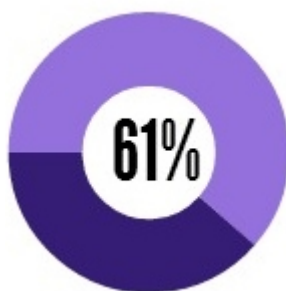


Figure 18: Percentage of Principals who Seek out Support from Personal or Professional Networks

Principals attempt to take care of their own mental health by seeking out and obtaining support from a wide range of sources. For instance, 61% of participants mentioned that they sought out support from a variety of personal and professional contacts. More than 27% indicated

that they relied on friends and family for support and encouragement, while approximately 25% of principals mentioned seeking advice from and using other principals as “sounding boards.” An additional 22% of principals who do not have vice-principals assigned to their schools indicated that they relied on members of their staff for support. Principals may not be aware of the supports available from the Ministry of Education or their district school boards, as only two participants indicated pursuing supports using that route; neither of these participants specified the particular board or Ministry supports they have accessed.

How Principals Spend Their Time. This research confirms the assertion in the OLF that leadership is “contingent.” Principals spent their time performing different actions based on their individual skills and knowledge, as well as on contextual factors. These contextual factors included school size, elementary/secondary, student needs, and the collective knowledge and expertise of staff. As such, principals indicated spending most of their time on a number of different areas and concerns.

Principals were observed to be involved in actions directly related to instructional leadership 22% of the time. However, principals allocated their time nearly equally across the five domains of the OLF. The domain wherein principals spent the next largest percentage of their time was Setting Directions (21%), followed by Securing Accountability (20%), Building Relationships (18%), and Developing the Organization (11%). It was also found that principals spent 8% of their time following-up with others.



Figure 19: Principals' Time Allocation within and across the OLF Domains

More than 35% of principals mentioned that they spent the vast majority of their time in communication. This communication was observed to be with teachers, other educational support workers, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

In terms of how principals communicate with people, observation data indicated that principals spent half their time in meetings focused on a range and variety of priorities, issues, and concerns that arose during an average school day. The purposes of these meetings included: building relationships with teachers, building relationships with parents, student discipline, student achievement, student supervision, data interpretation, instructional leadership, extra-curricular activities, facilities management, partnerships, social programs operating at the school, etc.

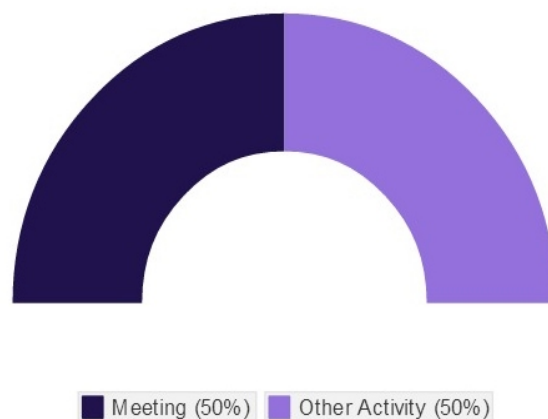


Figure 20: Percentage of Time Spent in Meetings

These meetings were observed as both formal and informal.

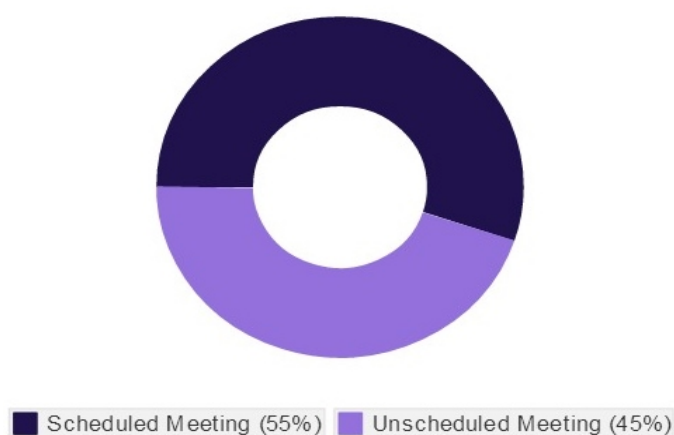


Figure 21: Percentage of Formal and Informal Meetings

Principals were also observed to be in constant communication, whether they were physically with people or alone. When alone, principals were observed engaging in a number of different actions, but spent most of their time communicating with others using technology. For instance, principals spent 38% of their time alone checking e-mail and performing actions on the computer, and an additional 22% of their time on the telephone. Principals also made use of their time alone by completing paperwork, which occurred 21% of the time, conducting walkthroughs of the school grounds (8%), catching up on professional reading (4%) and performing other actions (7%).

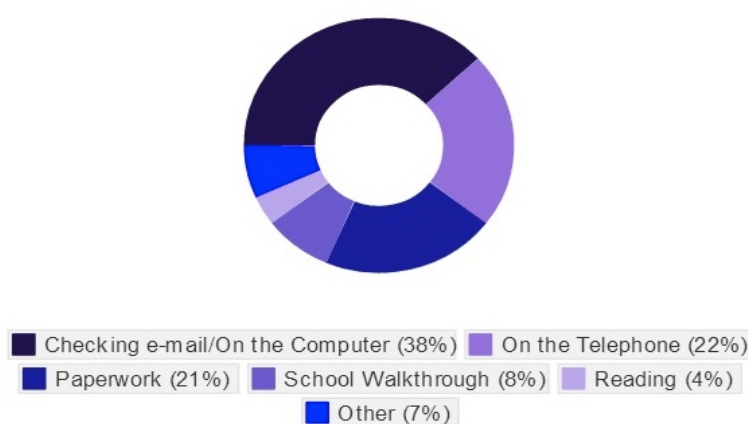


Figure 22: Percentage of Principals' Time Spent Alone

The two groups with whom principals were observed interacting the most were teachers (33%) and students (27%). Twenty principals indicated that these interactions were brief information exchanges. For instance, when asked to describe these exchanges, an elementary school principal stated:

I spend most of my time in conversation with people. I think a lot of this job is about meeting, greeting, and being available, so I spend most of the day here in consultation with other people, other parents, other staff members, other students.

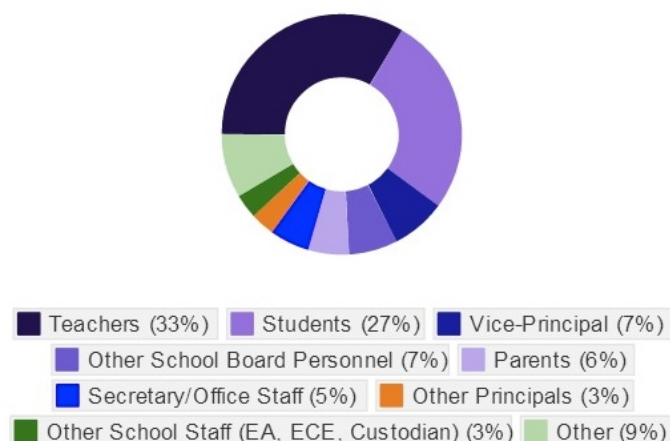


Figure 23: Percentage of Stakeholders with whom Principals Spent Time

Much of this communication occurred in the principal's office.

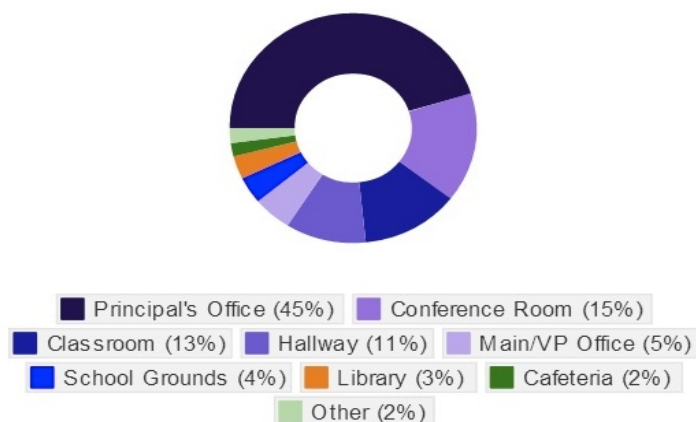


Figure 24: Percentage of Time Principals Spent in Different Locations

Principals' work occurs all over the school as well as off-site. The principal's office is where principals spent 45% of their time. The school conference room is where principals spent the next largest portion of their time (15%). In classrooms principals spent 13% of their time, with the hallway (11%) and main office (5%) being the fourth and fifth largest areas where principals allocated their time. Principals also spent smaller amounts of time perusing the school grounds, in the cafeteria, and at district school board offices.

The vast majority of the interactions in which principals participated occurred face-to-face (79%). Principals used virtual forms of communication (e.g., e-mail, telephone, cell phone) to interact with others 21% of the time. When communicating virtually, principals in the

observation sample used landline telephones 51% of the time. When principals chose to communicate with others virtually they did so using e-mail 43% of the time. When communicating virtually, principals also used the school public address system (3%) and other methods (e.g., Skype, cell phone) 3% of the time.

When interacting with others, discussion accounted for what principals were doing 53% of the time they were observed. Principals were also involved in student supervision (15%), delivering professional development (6%), school walkthroughs (5%), classroom observations (5%), networking (3%), data analysis (3%), and assisting in social programs at the school (3%) when interacting with others.

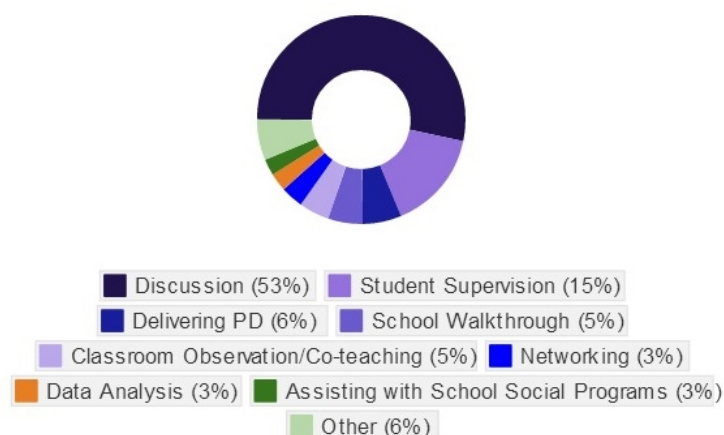


Figure 25: How Principals Spent their Time when Interacting with Others

In the qualitative data, 21% of the sample of principals reported that they spent most of their time on administrative activities that had an indirect influence on student learning. Of the 15 principals who indicated spending a great deal of time on administrative activities, five of them were principals who were in their first years in the role. The administrative activities in which principals were involved on a daily basis include signing documents, looking at data, writing reports, scheduling, and budgeting.

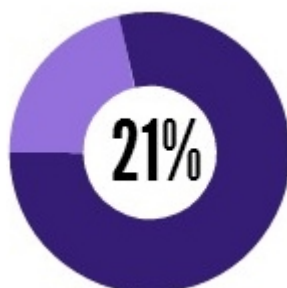


Figure 26: Percentage of Principals who Spent Most of their Time Managing Student Discipline

An additional 21% of principals spent most of their time at work dealing with student discipline concerns and creating a safe and positive environment conducive to student learning.

A lot of time is spent doing follow-up for behaviours that happen with students in the yard... and parents. Typically every day there will be messages for me to contact parents... I document everything, but it takes a lot of time.

As demonstrated by the above quote from an elementary school principal, principals often pointed out that student discipline alone is not very time consuming. However, following up with students, teachers, parents, and other school staff regarding student behaviour can take up a great deal of the workday.

Just over 10% of principals indicated that they spent the vast majority of their time leading instruction at their school. For instance, an elementary school principal mentioned: "...most of my time is spent trying to learn new things that [teachers are] doing. I spend a good chunk of my time learning things and learning along with the teachers and that's probably a good deal of my time." Eight principals indicated that they spent most of their time designing and delivering professional development sessions, observing teaching, conducting walkthroughs, and offering teachers advice and resources. An additional six principals spent most of their time building relationships with teachers, students, and other community stakeholders.

Areas Where Principals Want to Be More Involved. Principals also spoke about aspects and areas of their work in which they would like to be more involved. Additional involvement in instructional leadership at their school is an area where 64% of principals mentioned they would like to spend more time. This includes spending more time in the classroom observing teaching and questioning students about their learning.

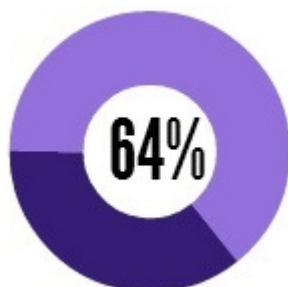


Figure 27: Percentage of Principals who would Like to do More Instructional Leadership

Although a desire for involvement was an overwhelming theme in the data, this finding should not be interpreted as principals' not devoting enough time to instructional leadership actions presently. Principals recognized the importance of instructional leadership in their work and expressed a desire to devote as much time and energy to these actions as possible. For instance, one elementary school principal said: "I would like to go into the classrooms more. I try to make it into rooms every day so that I actually know what's going on, but I don't get in every room every day." Although this particular principal was very confident and proud of the school's test scores and her/his ability to be an instructional leader, she/he still wanted to devote more time and resources to instruction.

Professional learning is another area where six principals indicated wanting to spend more time. A smaller numbers of principals also mentioned wanting to learn more about their students' lives.

How the Personal Leadership Resources are Evident in Principals' Work. This research provides further evidence that the social, psychological, and cognitive PLRs found in the OLF are integral to principals' work. Of the 452 time-structured observations across the six school sites, the PLRs were clearly evident in almost every task or activity principals performed at work. Forty percent of the activities in which principals were involved required cognitive resources. These cognitive resources included problem-solving skills and knowledge of factors that directly influence teaching and learning. Social resources (perceiving and managing emotions, and acting in emotionally appropriate ways) were evident in 30% of the actions performed by principals during the school-site observations. Psychological resources (optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and proactivity) were employed by principals in 23% of their actions.

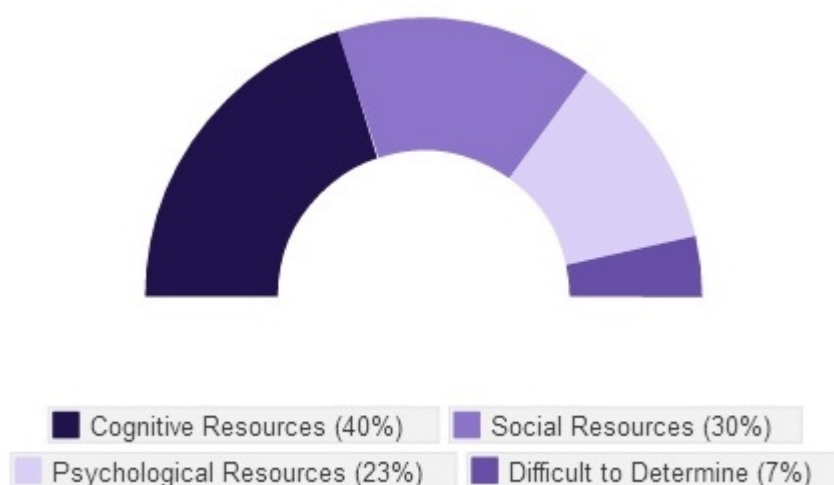


Figure 28: Percentage of Principal Actions that Required PLRs - Total

Principals drew on their PLRs when dealing with a variety of situations, including when they were alone and when they were interacting with others. When alone, it was observed that principals did not appear to draw on any PLRs 19% of the time. Cognitive resources were used by principals when completing 47% of their work alone. When alone at work, social resources and psychological resources impacted on by principals for 20% and 13% of their actions, respectively.

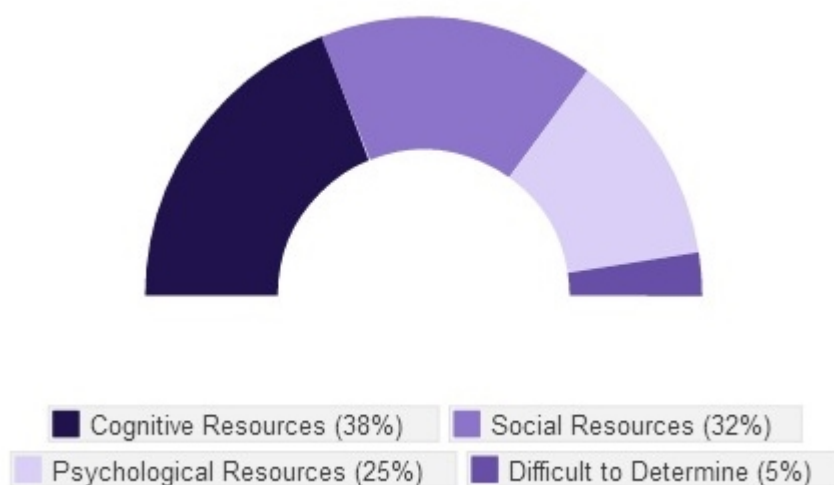


Figure 29: Percentage of Principal Actions that Required PLRs – Alone

Principals were more apt to turn to their PLRs when working with others. When interacting with others, principals drew on their cognitive resources 38% of the time. Principals drew on their social resources for 32% of their actions with others, and psychological resources 25% of the time. Due to the inter-related nature of the PLRs, it was difficult to determine which PLRs were impacting on principals when completing 5% of their actions with others.

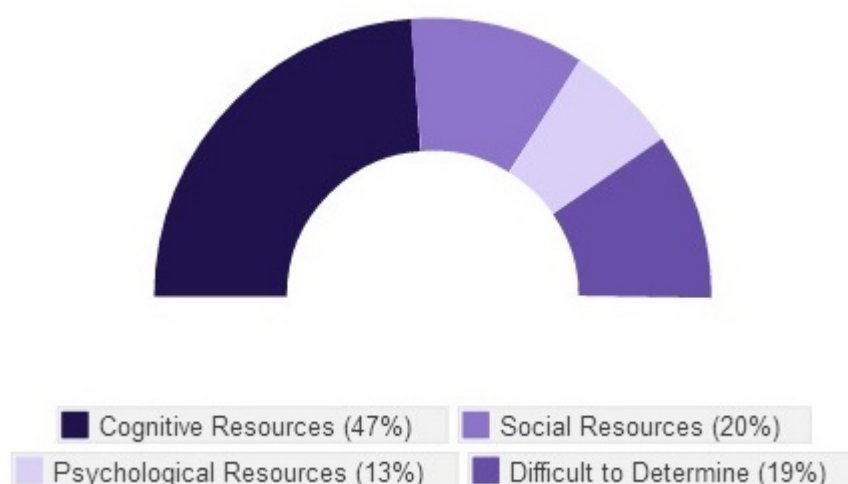


Figure 30: Percentage of Principal Actions that Required PLRs – With Others

Competing Priorities. Principals interviewed faced a number of disparate and competing priorities in their daily work. These included sitting on district committees, plant management in older school buildings, meetings outside of the school, paperwork, working with people, and systemic issues. Principals indicated drawing on a variety of PLRs to deal with these competing priorities. The types of PLRs used by the principals were contingent on a number of factors, such as school size, school level, prior experience, as well as the competing priorities faced by principals on a daily basis. As such, a small number of principals reported using their problem-solving skills to devise strategies for ensuring that schools operated well in their absence, and in dealing with people on a daily basis. Resilience and self-efficacy were mentioned as PLRs that assisted principals in navigating systemic issues. An elementary school principal put this best by saying: “I think people get easily frustrated—maybe they are not very resilient—in terms of trying to be creative and trying to create those changes. Then they complain.” When faced with paperwork as one of their competing priorities, principals tended

to rely on their abilities to stay optimistic, mostly gained through the opportunity to help students learn and grow.

Principals' Work and the Ontario Leadership Framework. This section of the findings focuses on how the OLF is perceived by principals and how it is evident in their work.

How principals use the OLF. The OLF has served as an important resource in the growth and development of principals in the province. Forty-nine percent of the study sample indicated that they used the OLF as a reference or support to plan and guide their own professional learning, as well as that of their vice-principals and members of their teaching staff who were interested in leadership roles. An elementary principal stated: "I've used it to formulate my own growth plan, and it is nice to have something that's balanced for me to look at when doing this planning." This response was typical of participants who mentioned using the OLF to guide their own professional learning. Six principals, nearly 10% of the sample, also mentioned using the OLF when mentoring beginning principals. The OLF provides mentors with a set of evidence-based leadership practices that they can use to suggest to mentees what to strengthen.

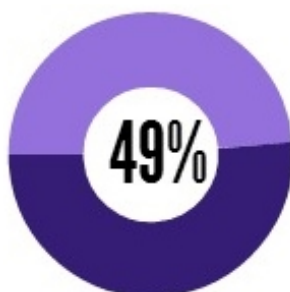


Figure 31: Percentage of Principals who Use the OLF to Support or Guide their Professional Learning

Forty-four percent of principals interviewed use the OLF as a touchstone to guide their daily work. An elementary principal mentioned that the OLF "gives guidance and direction for how [effective leadership] is going to look." Similarly, another elementary principal stated:

...the OLF is great; it's the first time there has been that type of a framework, and I'm glad that there is a provincial standard that's there... I want to use it as a guide. I want to be the one that has the professional sense to choose what I need to work on out of the domains and practices.

The OLF provides these principals with a reference point they can use to confirm that they are providing effective leadership in their schools.

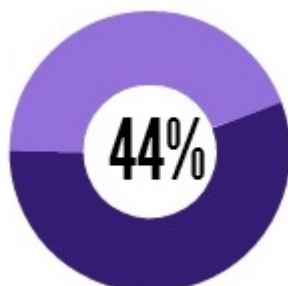


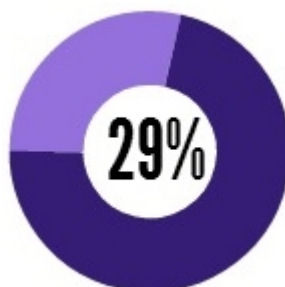
Figure 32: Percentage of Principals who Use the OLF to Guide their Daily Work

The OLF also serves as a document that principals use to reflect on their practice. This was mentioned by nearly 10% of the principals interviewed.

Perceived Strengths and Limitations of the OLF. Principals offered their perceptions on the strengths and limitations of the current Ontario Leadership Framework.

Strengths. Principals identified four strengths of the current OLF. A total of 29% of principals mentioned that the OLF's utility as a professional development tool is its greatest strength. Further, the OLF is aligned with much of what principals actually do on a daily basis. An elementary school principal put it simply: "...the OLF drives what we do." Just over 10% of principals identified the introduction of the PLRs in the OLF as one of its strengths. .

Figure 33: Percentage of Principals who Indicated the OLF's Greatest Strength is as a Tool for Professional Development



It is also worth mentioning that principals offered a number of generally positive comments about the OLF. However, these comments were mostly surface-level and contained little, if any, data about how the OLF influenced their work. The contingent nature of the document is

another theme identified by principals when discussing the strengths of the OLF, although it was mentioned less frequently.

Limitations. According to principals, the OLF has two limitations. Just over 22% of principals find that the OLF is not a practical document. These principals indicated that the OLF is “too wordy” and “resembles a checklist” rather than a reasoned and evidence-based approach to leadership. In the words of an experienced secondary school principal: “...some of

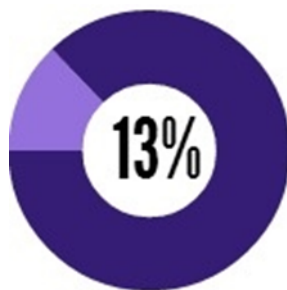


Figure 34: Percentage of Principals who Feel the OLF does not Align with their Daily Work

It does not follow. It is too 'airy fairy,' too artificial, too wordy and not really factual.”

Approximately 13% of principals mentioned that the current OLF does not encompass everything required of their role. In particular, these principals perceived that the OLF does not fully acknowledge the scope of the plant and resource management actions required of them on a daily basis. This is despite the inclusion of the “Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment” leadership practice within the “Developing the Organization” domain of the OLF. For the most part, these principals acknowledged that the OLF takes the position that everything a principal does should have a direct or indirect influence on student learning. However, they were suspicious about the impact that some actions they are legally mandated to perform had on student learning. These principals also indicated that the OLF does not acknowledge that they are required to complete many brief, fragmented activities because of the competing priorities they face in their work on a daily basis.

Leadership Practices and Personal Leadership Resources. This section offers a compilation of the various practices in which principals engage in on a daily basis. Findings related to these practices are organized based on each of the five domains (Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization and Supporting

Desired Practices, Leading the Instructional Program, and Securing Accountability) of the Ontario Leadership Framework. Those related to the five domains of the OLF are discussed first, in the order presented above. Findings related to the PLRs and how principals use the OLF can be found throughout this section, though the focus of this research was not on the PLRs section of the OLF. It is worth mentioning that, because of the holistic and inter-connected nature of the OLF, some key themes overlap among different domains.

Setting Directions. The leadership practices nested in this domain of the OLF concentrate on how principals ensure that staff and stakeholders are working towards the same goals, and that these align with community needs as well as district goals and priorities. Building a shared vision, identifying specific, shared short-term goals, creating high expectations, and communicating the vision and goals are the four leadership practices in this

Setting Directions – Practices

Building a shared vision – facilitating staff development of the school improvement plan; providing opportunities for staff to collaborate and supporting collaborative efforts; advocating for healthy student development.

Identifying specific, short-term goals – analyzing/reviewing student achievement data.

Creating high expectations – modelling positive behaviours and maintaining a focus on increased student achievement.

Communicating the vision and goals – professional development and professional learning communities; treating all students and stakeholders with respect.

domain of the OLF. The following subsections discuss themes related to how principals enact each of these practices in their work.

Building a shared vision. Principals interviewed understood the importance of building a shared vision for school-level goals and priorities. Principals worked towards building a shared vision by taking a collaborative approach to the school improvement planning process. Similar to the elementary principal quoted below, 50% of the principals interviewed indicated they built a shared vision for their school by facilitating staff development of the school improvement plan. One principal indicated:

In our School Improvement Plan we have focused on literacy for the past 4 years. If it were solely left up to me, I would probably be adding a math goal next year, but when we met last week as a group, everyone else felt strongly that they wanted to continue to work on literacy exclusive of math. We looked at our data from our report cards and EQAO, and that is how they decided. When we go to our staff meeting to discuss our goals, it will be our division leaders presenting not me.

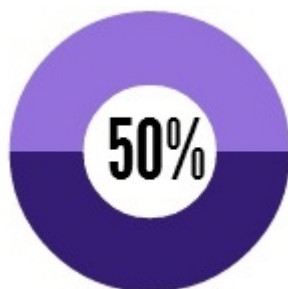


Figure 35: Percentage of Principals who Use the School Improvement Plan to Build a Shared Vision

Providing opportunities for staff to collaborate and supporting collaborative efforts was another strategy used by 20% of principals to build a shared vision. The final theme related to how principals build a shared vision at their schools is through advocacy for healthy student development. Ten percent of principals primarily set directions by emphasizing student mental health alongside academics to create a safe learning environment free of bullying.

Identifying specific, short-term goals. Principals identified specific, shared, short-term goals for the school and its students by analyzing and reviewing student performance measures, including EQAO achievement data, with staff and other stakeholders. In a typical response to the interview question about setting directions, a secondary principal said she looked at data with staff to understand, “what is coming our way; what are the areas that we need to focus on?” It is important to emphasize that there was overwhelming agreement amongst principals regarding the use of this strategy for identifying specific, shared, short-term goals. Using data was mentioned by 86% of the principals interviewed for this research.

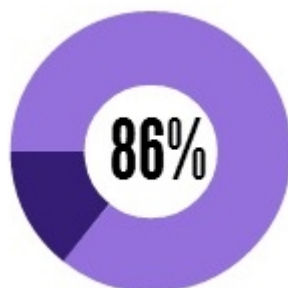


Figure 36: Percentage of Principals who Reported Using Data to Identify Specific, Short-Term Goals

Creating high expectations. A small number of principals mentioned creating high expectations for staff and students when asked about how they set directions at the school level. Placing high expectations on students and stakeholders serves as a source of hope and inspiration for staff and students, especially those in difficult circumstances. An elementary principal said: “I have high expectations for every person here, every staff member, every student... despite coming from disadvantaged homes, our students need to have the same hope as the [more affluent] kids across town.”

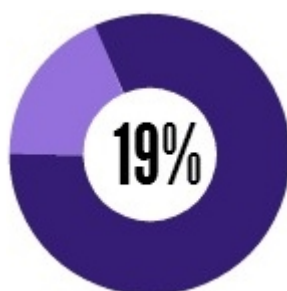


Figure 37: Percentage of Principals who Reported Creating Expectations by Modelling

Approximately 19% of the sample reported creating high expectations at their schools by modelling positive behaviours and maintaining a focus on increased student achievement.

Communicating the vision and goals. Principals interviewed mentioned communicating the vision and goals of the school to their staff as well as to external stakeholders. Principals communicated the shared vision to teachers and other staff in two ways. The first is through professional development and professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs provide principals with the opportunity to develop professional learning for their teaching staff that responds to gaps in instruction and is clearly aligned with the learning needs of students at the

school. An elementary principal indicated that mandatory PLCs, if run successfully, can bring a focus to teaching and learning that can influence the whole school:

[The PLCs] should be part of our everyday conversations. That's sort of my goal, to try to create more of those conversations in the hall and in the classrooms about teacher learning with respect to mathematics. That's what I'm doing this year – that's my focus, that's my theory.

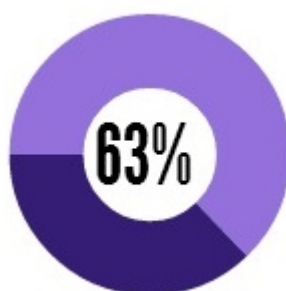


Figure 37: Percentage of Principals who used Professional Development to Communicate Vision and Goals

Leading professional development activities that aligned with the goals and shared vision of the school, or providing staff with release time to pursue learning opportunities that support school-level goals is how 63% of the sample communicated the vision and goals of the school. An additional 8% of principals reported communicating the vision and goals of the school by treating all students with respect, and maintaining a focus on improving student achievement. Building relationships based on mutual respect is how principals characterized communicating their vision and goals for the school to external stakeholders, such as parents.

Building Relationships and Developing People. All school principals interviewed agreed that “leadership is all about relationships.” This domain of the OLF is centred on a principals’ ability to influence staff in building their professional capacity. Capacity building is related to both the development of new knowledge and skills in staff, and the persistence and disposition necessary to apply them effectively. How principals enact each of these leadership practices is discussed in the remainder of this section.

Building Relationships – Practices

Providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members – being available and being visible in an effort to build trusting relationships with staff; hosting events at their homes or at local restaurants to celebrate staff achievements, or to show appreciation and to acknowledge the work they do on a daily basis.

Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff – creating a positive school climate; obtaining staff input in school-wide professional development activities; engaging in courageous conversations with staff.

Modelling the schools' values and practices – modelling positive behaviours.

Building trusting relationships with, and among, staff, students and parents – being available, supporting learning and professional development needs, and serving as a “sounding board” when teachers need to talk about personal and professional problems; respecting the professional knowledge and skills of each staff member; constant two-way communication; getting to know students on a personal level.

Establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives – communication; advance planning.

Providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members.

Principals focused on listening, being available, and being visible in an effort to build trusting relationships with staff when responding to a question about how they support staff members. For instance, an elementary principal indicated that when dealing with staff, “I listen and am not overly judgmental.” Similarly, another elementary principal mentioned that he supported staff by “doing what I can to be available and accessible to people.”

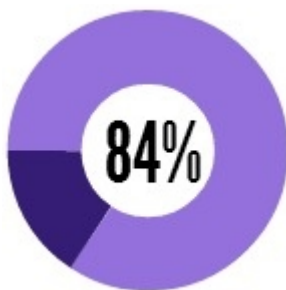


Figure 38: Percentage of Principals who Support Staff by Listening, Being Visible, and Being Available

Almost 84% of principals indicated that they supported staff in a similar manner. A smaller number of principals indicated that they host events at their homes or at local restaurants to

celebrate staff achievements, or to show appreciation and acknowledge the work they do on a daily basis.

Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff. Principals mentioned they stimulate growth in the professional capacities of their staff in three ways. The first was through efforts to create a positive school climate. This was mentioned by 31% of principals.

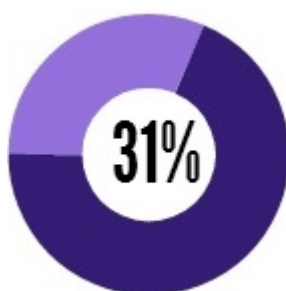


Figure 39: Percentage of Principals who Build Capacity in Staff by Creating a Positive School Climate

A positive environment ensures that staff can focus on their practice and professional growth without being concerned about negativity on the part of leadership or other teachers. One principal mentioned that this strategy is about

having such an open building that you're sharing the best practices, which means that you are collaborating and there should be a comfort level where we can talk. I should be able to say 'Why don't you come in and let me show that to you?'

The second way principals mentioned growing professional capacities in staff was through obtaining their input in school-wide professional development activities, such as professional learning communities or sessions delivered on professional activity days. Obtaining input was mentioned by approximately 17% of principals. The final way that principals mentioned stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff was through courageous conversations with staff. Almost 10% of the sample mentioned having courageous conversations with staff who were initially resistant to embracing professional growth opportunities.

Modelling the school's values and practices. When asked about how they built relationships, 54% of principals reported modelling their school's values. They also mentioned that modelling helps build credibility in their leadership and in staff morale. An elementary principal mentioned: "I feel it's important that I model what I expect from everyone." Another elementary principal elaborated on that sentiment by saying that modelling is important

because “you have to be a worker as well. Learning is doing the work along with the teachers and showing them that you’re a team player.”

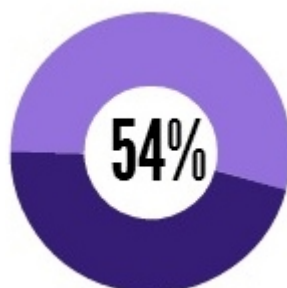


Figure 40: Percentage of Principals who Model the School’s Values to Aid in Building Relationships

Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents. Eighty-seven percent of principals discussed how they built relationships with staff. These principals reported using a number of strategies to build relationships with staff, including being available, supporting learning and professional development needs, and serving as a “sounding board” when teachers needed to talk about personal and professional problems. All of these principals also mentioned that having respect for the professional knowledge and skills of each staff member was vital. One elementary principal stated: “My approach [to building relationships] is respect, always. That’s my number one goal, respect and appreciation for what people have to offer.”

Building relationships with parents was another important aspect of principals’ work. When asked how they built relationships with parents, 59% of principals indicated that they built relationships with parents through constant, two-way communication.

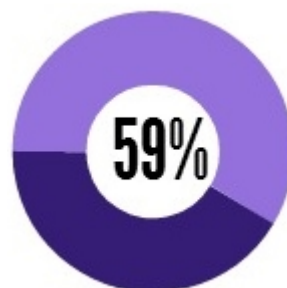


Figure 41: Percentage of Principals who use Two-Way Communication to Build Relationships with Parents

This includes being visible and available to communicate with parents, and using active listening skills to understand parents’ issues and concerns when meeting in person. The use of a school

newsletter, school website, telephone, and e-mail were all mentioned as ways in which principals communicated with parents. Slightly more than 40% of principals discussed actively seeking out community partners. Principals also highlighted how the specific context of their school community posed different challenges for engaging parents, including busy work lives and transportation issues. Almost 25% of principals reported building relationships with parents by hosting evening events, parent nights, and extracurricular events at the school.

Approximately 35% of principals discussed building relationships with students. These principals emphasized the importance of getting to know students on a personal level in order to better understand and help them achieve their academic goals. The vast majority of these principals indicated that they built relationships with students by being available to answer their questions and being visible in the classrooms and throughout the school. Other strategies principals used to build relationships with students were demonstrating fairness when disciplining students, and providing them with emotional support. Each of these strategies was mentioned by 10% of principals.

Establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives. Principals are responsible for managing relationships with the various unions who represent workers at the school.

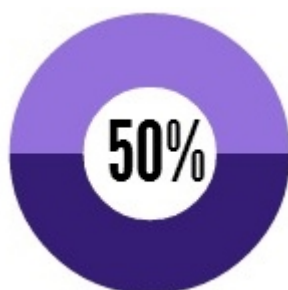


Figure 42: Percentage of Principals who Indicated Building Relationships with Teacher Federation Representatives is a Large Aspect of their Work

Fifty percent of the principals interviewed spoke about how building and maintaining relationships with union personnel is a key component of their work. One secondary school principal, for example, said, "...with union stewards... you're always very conscious of the policies and collective agreements that are in place. So you have proactive conversations so you do not run into any issues. You're always very aware of that, abundantly." Principals

highlighted the difficulty in avoiding strife or grievances while juggling the demands of (up to five) different collective bargaining agreements. Most principals indicated that they have good relationships with the various union stewards responsible for their schools. Principals also mentioned that their problem-solving skills were vital to anticipating potential issues and reaching solutions with workers before a formal grievance was filed.

Recent changes to staff collective bargaining agreements have created further changes in principals' work for 10 of the interview participants (14% of the sample). The recent lessening of teacher supervision time has combined with prior legislation that ensures students will be supervised at all times to create a situation wherein principals are spending an increasing amount of time on actions such as bus/yard duty. Principals recognize that student safety and supervision is of the utmost importance. However, these principals reported that this new change has placed even more limitations on their time to deal with other leadership issues.

Developing the Organization. The leadership practices contained in this domain help school-level leaders keep their school infrastructure aligned with directions set in school, district, and provincial improvement efforts. Leaders must periodically restructure and refine their staffing complement to facilitate more efficient and effective student learning. Six practices are identified under *Developing the Organization*. These include: building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership; building productive relationships with families/community; structuring the organization to support collaboration; connecting the school to the wider environment; maintaining a safe and healthy environment; and allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals. Respondent perceptions of their practices and competencies regarding these practices are discussed in the following subsections.

Developing the Organization – Practices

Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership – creating an environment conducive to collaboration; modelling collaboration; delegating activities to interested staff.

Structuring the organization to support collaboration – distributing leadership; creating a safe and supportive working environment.

Building productive relationships with families/communities – open and effective communication; creating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all stakeholders; celebrating diversity and demonstrating respect; hosting events at the school; establishing effective relationships with the school council; supporting families and providing them with food and other basic necessities; disseminating and celebrating student achievement scores.

Connecting the school to the wider environment – developing partnerships and strong working relationships with community groups and agencies; referring students and their families to community agencies to receive necessary supports.

Maintaining a safe and healthy environment – modelling desirable behaviours; attending to occupational health and safety concerns.

Allocating resources to support student learning and school improvement – providing food and basic necessities for students and their families; providing teachers release time to participate in professional development opportunities; upgrading school infrastructure and facilities; fundraising; maintaining the school budget.

Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership. Just over 97% of principals indicated that they aimed to build a collaborative culture at their school by creating an environment conducive to collaboration. Principals also mentioned modelling collaboration, delegating leadership actions to interested staff members, and keeping the focus of the school culture on improving student learning.

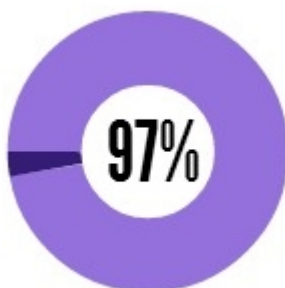


Figure 43: Percentage of Principals who Aim to Create an Environment Conducive to Collaboration

Structuring the organization to support collaboration. Principals discussed strategies used to structure their organization to support collaboration. Responses related to this

leadership practice were closely tied to those given when interviewees discussed the ways in which they built a collaborative culture and distributed leadership within their schools. A total of 97% of principals mentioned that distributing leadership and creating a safe and welcoming environment for staff to offer feedback and support to colleagues was the main strategy used to promote collaboration at the school level. Finding opportunities to delegate leadership for certain activities to interested staff members and modelling collaborative behaviour were two other strategies used by principals to structure their organization to support collaboration.

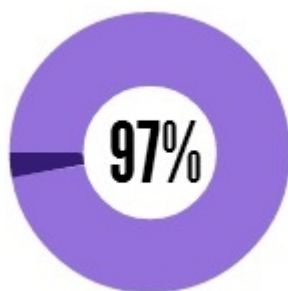


Figure 44: Percentage of Principals who Aim to Distribute Leadership and Create a Safe Working Environment to Support Collaboration

Building productive relationships with families/communities. Principals reported using a number of strategies to build productive relationships with families and their larger school communities. The most prominent of these strategies was practicing open and effective communication. Principals indicated that maintaining open and effective communication with parents and the larger community is a “two-way street.” They made efforts to keep parents informed through school signage, school websites, newsletters, and calls home. Principals also took time to listen to concerned parents and devise mutually beneficial solutions.

Creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all parents, regardless of ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other factors was another strategy used by principals to build productive relationships with families and the larger school community. Twenty-three percent of principals mentioned a number of methods for creating a safe atmosphere, including valuing and respecting diversity, and inviting parents to participate in their child’s learning in ways they felt comfortable. Similarly, 20% of principals reported building relationships with families and the larger community by hosting events at the school, parent nights, and picnics. Principals also reported that while these events needed to be organized and can be costly

(especially in rural areas where parents have to be bussed to the school), they benefited because the events developed effective and productive relationships between staff and community stakeholders.

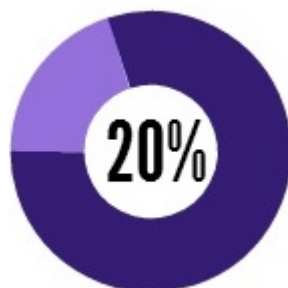


Figure 45: Percentage of Principals who use School-Based Events to Build Productive Relationships with Families and the Community

All schools are mandated to have a school council. Establishing an effective school council was how 19% of principals characterized building productive relationships with families and the larger community. These principals indicated that school councils can have a comprehensive understanding of local needs, knowledge which can be beneficial in their work. Some additional strategies mentioned for building productive relationships with families and the larger community included supporting families and providing them with food and other basic necessities (12%), and effectively disseminating and reporting student achievement scores (10%).

Principals in rural locations had to overcome issues with transportation. One strategy a number of principals employed was providing a bus to take parents to and from the school site. Other issues mentioned that made it more challenging for principals to build productive relationships with families and communities were parents working late in the evenings, and occasionally strained relations with school councils. Offering flexible times to meet with parents, or communicating via telephone or e-mail were mentioned as strategies used to mitigate challenges arising from difficulties meeting with dual-income parents during the school day. Setting parameters for behaviour during school council meetings and ensuring that each member of council understood their role were useful strategies for principals in managing interactions within the school council.

Connecting the school to the wider environment. When discussing how they connected the school to the wider environment, most principals mentioned having more contact with the police and other community agencies than ever before.

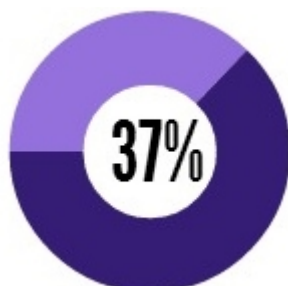


Figure 46: Percentage of Principals who Mentioned Referring Students/Parents to Community-Based Supports

These principals (37% of the sample) mentioned acting as a liaison and referring students and their families to community agencies to receive necessary supports. A number of secondary themes emerged related to this leadership practice. Some principals mentioned that as part of engaging newcomer families, they referred families to supports to help them become better accustomed to life in Ontario. Approximately 4% of principals discussed partnerships with the community parish or other faith-based organizations located in their community.

Maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Principals go about maintaining a safe and healthy environment for staff, students, and the community by attending to both the overall school climate and the occupational health and safety regulations. Exactly 54% of the principals interviewed mentioned modelling desirable behaviours in an effort to “set the tone” to create a warm and welcoming environment.

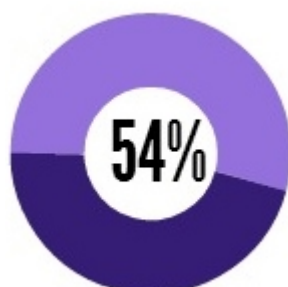


Figure 47: Percentage of Principals who Model Behaviours to Maintain a Safe/Healthy Environment

As discussed in an earlier section, 37% of principals indicated that they also sought to preserve a safe and healthy school environment by attending to occupational health and safety concerns at the school site. This involved completing and leading required occupational health and safety training, as well as maintaining the school's physical plant. In terms of occupational health and safety, principals mentioned that they "learn on the go" and lead by example. This involves becoming familiar with rules and regulations, modelling compliance, and enforcing the rules. For instance, an elementary school principal mentioned that staff refused to wear safety vests in the yard until she began modelling that behaviour. She said: "Our yard is difficult so I bought everyone their own vest and I always wear my vest when I go out, so they wear their vest when they go out now." Following occupational health and safety protocols was a key strategy principals used to maintain a safe and healthy environment.

Allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals. Principals discussed their role in allocating resources to build teacher capacity, support increased student achievement, and create a safe and healthy learning environment. When discussing this leadership practice, 63% of principals highlighted allocating resources to provide basic necessities to students and families in need. "So our students come to school, many of them with a great financial need... we buy \$18,000 of food a year to feed each student, every day." It is worth mentioning that the elementary principal who offered this quote indicated that, at least anecdotally, their school breakfast program has been associated with increased student achievement.

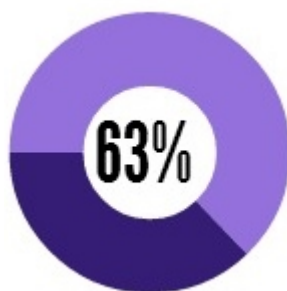


Figure 48: Percentage of principals who indicated allocating resources to meet students' basic needs

Principals also allocated resources to improve student achievement. This was reported in two ways. The first involved using school funds to increase teacher capacity. Principals did

this by offering teachers release time to participate in professional development opportunities linked to school and district improvement plans. The second way principals allocated resources to improve student achievement was by facilitating upgrades to school infrastructure. Most principals who mentioned facilitating upgrades indicated investing in Wi-Fi internet connectivity or using school funds for pieces of instructional technology, like iPads, digital cameras, and document readers. Over 15% of principals mentioned using each of these strategies.

Principals also mentioned maintaining a budget and fundraising when discussing allocating resources at the school level. Exactly 31% of principals interviewed talked about developing a school budget with staff by getting them involved in the process and seeking their input regarding resource needs. This practice helped staff to have realistic expectations about the resources, technology, and other purchases that the school could make each year. In terms of budgeting, 12% of principals mentioned challenges regarding not running a deficit while still providing the necessary supports for their student population. All but one of these principals was relatively new to the role, so it may be the case that many are experiencing a learning curve in getting accustomed to managing a budget.

Leading the Instructional Program. Principals unanimously agreed that improving the quality of teaching and learning at their schools was a high-level priority. This section describes the ways in which principals improved the instructional program at their schools.

Leading the Instructional Program – Practices

Staffing the instructional program – engaging in human resource planning by hiring candidates to fill existing or future needs; supporting staff resource needs and professional learning goals.

Providing instructional support – encouraging staff to engage with and observe effective instruction within and outside of the school; assisting staff in identifying learning needs; participating in professional learning with staff; staying current with instructional methods and strategies.

Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement – formal and informal observation of classroom instruction; leading data interpretation activities.

Buffering staff from distractions – ensuring that all instructional methods and teaching techniques align with the goals and priorities espoused by the school and district school board; developing guidelines for the amount and nature of time teaching faculty spend on non-instructional endeavours.

Staffing the instructional program. Principals spoke about the importance of staffing in improving their school’s instructional program. An elementary school principal was among the 60% of participants who discussed the importance of staffing: “The staffing piece is very much a curricular connection because I’m trying to think about the skill set that each teacher brings and their strengths.” Principals hired appropriate teaching staff by being selective during the interview process and hiring candidates to fill existing or future needs.² Principals also see benefit in providing professional development opportunities to grow skills in existing staff. Consequently, 20% of the sample interviewees discussed trying to retain staff by supporting their staff resource needs and professional learning goals.

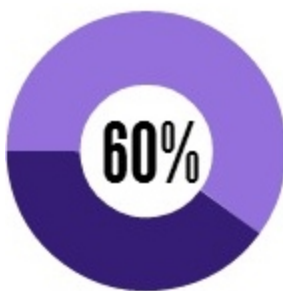


Figure 49: Percentage of Principals who Discussed Staffing

Providing instructional support. All principals interviewed mentioned that they provided instructional support to teachers and other staff as part of their role as instructional leaders.

² As this research was conducted before, or in some cases, shortly after Bill 274/12 ascended in September, 2012, it is worth pointing out that principal perceptions regarding their roles and practices in relation to staffing may have changed since the bill’s introduction and implementation.

Principals identified a number of different ways in which they provided this instructional support. Sixty-four percent of principals in the interview sample discussed providing instructional support for staff by encouraging them to engage with and observe effective instruction within and outside of the school. Principals did this by connecting staff with expert instructional coaches and providing them with the appropriate resources to maximize learning in their classrooms.

Fifty-eight percent of principals mentioned working with staff to determine their learning needs, as well as those of the student population. Principals also pointed out that they provided instructional support by participating in instructional work with staff. This was mentioned by 56% of the principals, who indicated that learning alongside their teaching staff helped build their credibility as instructional leaders. The importance of staying current with instructional methods and strategies, either through videos produced by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat or other professional learning, was mentioned by 30% of principals.

Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement. Monitoring progress in student achievement is a key aspect of principals' work. Principals described two distinct strategies used to improve the instructional program at their schools. Both of these strategies – observing classroom teaching and leading data interpretation activities – will be discussed in the sections that follow.



Figure 50: Percentage of Principals who Observe Classroom Teaching

Observing classroom teaching. All interview participants indicated that they observed classroom teaching using two distinct methods. Teaching evaluations and other formal assessments of teacher quality was the first method principals used to observe classroom teaching. The second method of classroom observation involved principals making short, unannounced, and informal “drop-ins” to various classrooms while completing walkthroughs of

the school site. Principals indicated that the goal of these informal observations of student learning was to offer advice and support to their staff in a non-threatening and non-evaluative manner. Principals looked for a number of items when observing teaching, including: the look of the classroom, curriculum expectations, curricular connections, classroom orderliness, engagement of higher order thinking skills, and the use of classroom technology and other visuals aids.

Leading data interpretation activities. The second strategy used to monitor progress in student achievement, mentioned by half of the sample of principals, involved leading data interpretation activities, or at least providing time or support for teaching faculty to understand and effectively use data to guide their practice and professional learning. The final strategy principals mentioned involved examining school-level data over time in an effort to establish and respond to trends in student learning.

Buffering staff from distractions. Fifty-six percent of principals discussed the importance of buffering staff from distractions that could dilute the effectiveness of their teaching practice. For instance, one secondary school principal mentioned: “As a principal, we scramble to protect our staff from a barrage of things that come.” Principals interviewed understood that it was vital for staff to be focused on student learning, and that their instructional methods and techniques align with the goals and priorities espoused by the school and district school board.

More than 20% of principals also mentioned having to develop guidelines for the amount and nature of time teaching faculty spend on non-instructional endeavours. These principals indicated that they understood the importance of rich and fun extracurricular activities, but emphasized that these opportunities could not come at the expense of student achievement.

Securing Accountability. When interviewing principals about securing accountability, two practices were most prominent. The first practice addressed how principals built a sense of internal accountability amongst staff. Meeting the demands for external accountability was the second leadership practice. Findings related to each of these practices are discussed below. A short discussion of the stakeholders to whom principals felt most accountable concludes this section.

Securing Accountability – Practices

Building staff members sense of internal accountability – building instructional capacity at the school-level; ensuring individual learning goals and professional learning for staff are aligned with board and ministry goals and priorities; modelling positive behaviours, such as transparency and compliance; supporting student needs; maintaining visibility; creating a positive learning environment.

Meeting the demands of external accountability – maintaining regular and open communication with families; attaining student performance standards or increasing student achievement outcomes; being visible and available to meet and chat with parents; transparency; maintaining a safe, positive, and welcoming learning environment.

Building staff members' sense of internal accountability. Building an internal sense of accountability amongst staff is one of the leadership practices within the Security Accountability domain of the OLF. Principals interviewed referenced using many different strategies to enact this leadership expectation. Mentioned by 41% of principals, the first and most prominent of these strategies was building instructional capacity at the school level. This included ensuring that individual goals and professional development opportunities for staff are aligned with goals and priorities at the school, district school board, and Ministry levels. For instance, an elementary school principal pointed out: "...in validating the professionals who work in the building, you have to find a way that their own annual, individual goals, and the goals they have for their division and their children, line up with board priorities."

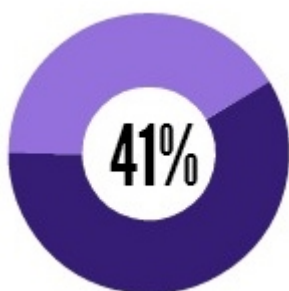


Figure 51: Percentage of Principals who Built Instructional Capacity to Secure Internal Accountability

Modelling positive behaviours, such as transparency and compliance with district school board and Ministry priorities, was the second strategy reported by principals used to build a sense of internal accountability amongst staff. By modelling positive behaviours and doing what was asked of them, principals highlighted the importance of school, district, and ministry

priorities to staff. For instance, one elementary school principal said: “I do what I’m supposed to do... the superintendent would say ‘This needs to be done’ – you do it, there’s no question.” This strategy was mentioned by 39% of principals interviewed.

The third strategy principals used to build a sense of internal accountability amongst staff was supporting student needs throughout the school building. Principals used data to identify areas of academic need, and then allocated appropriate resources to ensure that students had the necessary interventions (e.g., teacher professional development, instructional programs and technology, different instructional approaches) to succeed. When answering the interview question concerning securing accountability, an elementary school principal said: “I can show you every single student who is below sixty-five percent and what we are going to do to move them along. It’s that kind of detail.”

Maintaining visibility and creating and maintaining a positive work environment were other strategies for building a sense of internal accountability amongst staff, mentioned by 9% of principals. A smaller number of principals indicated that creating high expectations was their primary strategy for attaining competency in this leadership practice.

Meeting the demands of external accountability. Principals were aware that their external accountability extended beyond parents of students who attend their school. However, their answers to questions surrounding this leadership practice were solely focused on how they met the demands of parental external accountability requirements. Principals mentioned using five main strategies related to this leadership practice; each is discussed in the remainder of this section.

Maintaining regular and open communication with parents was the number one way that principals met their demands for external accountability. For instance, an elementary school principal mentioned that to meet her external accountability demands, she “spends a lot of time making parents understand the work that we do. Whether that’s through the website or through the newsletter or through meetings.” Principals used a multi-pronged approach to communicate with parents, including the use of newsletters, school websites, e-mail, telephone calls, informal chats, and in-person meetings. This helped ensure that information about

important dates or events at the school were disseminated to the largest possible segment of the school's parent population.

Twenty-four percent of the principals who participated in the interviews met the external accountability demands of parents by attaining student achievement standards or increasing student performance outcomes. Student performance measures, particularly EQAO achievement data, provided principals with assessment and monitoring tools that could be used to show fiscal responsibility to taxpayers and moral responsibility to parents. An elementary school principal who uses this strategy mentioned: "I share the EQAO data with parents and I talk to them about our school goals." EQAO scores and other student performance measures also provided principals with a "jumping off point" from which they could get parents more involved in schooling either at the school site or in the home.

Being visible and available to meet and chat with parents was the third strategy used by 24% of principals in the interview sample. Rooted in customer service and relationship building, this strategy was characterized by principals putting aside other priorities to meet with parents to discuss any concerns they had about the school. An elementary principal put it simply, saying: "I am always available, the phone is always here. Parents always know that they can call, they know that I want to create those relationships with them."

Transparency was the fourth key strategy used by principals to meet the external accountability demands of parents. Maintaining transparency has the potential to build trust between parents and actors at the school level. Principals achieve transparency by sharing information (e.g., student achievement data, school budget, etc.) with stakeholders in the school community.

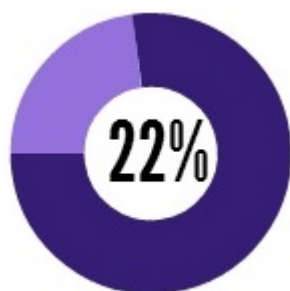


Figure 52: Percentage of Principals who use Transparency to Meet the Demands of External Accountability

Transparency was mentioned by 22% of principals as a means to meet the demands of external accountability. For instance, a secondary school principal mentioned: “I make a point of being transparent and share things like the budget with the school council.” Principals promoted and maintained transparency in a number of ways, including making some items of the school budget public, providing parents with an opportunity to have a voice beyond school council, and providing parents with copies of relevant policies and procedures.

Maintaining a safe, positive, and welcoming learning environment for students and parents was the fifth and final theme to emerge related to this leadership practice. Just over 11% of principals interviewed indicated using this strategy to meet the external accountability demands of parents at their school.

Who principals feel accountable to. Principals indicated that they were accountable to diverse and varied stakeholder groups that have competing, and sometimes overlapping interests. Sixty-four percent of principals mentioned that students and their parents were the main stakeholder group to whom they felt accountable. For instance, a secondary school principal mentioned: “...the biggest accountability I feel is towards the students: that they are receiving quality teaching, that they are learning and having a good high school experience.” These principals concerned themselves with ensuring that students were both learning and having a positive school experience free of bullying.

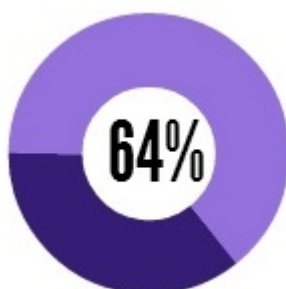


Figure 53: Percentage of Principals who Feel Accountable to Students and Parents

Principals also felt a significant amount of accountability to their employers, including their superintendents, district school boards, and the Ministry of Education. “We are accountable to a lot of people. I’m accountable to my superintendent, and my director, and the board,” said one of the elementary principals interviewed for this research. At 47% of the

sample, nearly half of the principals who participated in this research indicated feeling accountable to their employer.

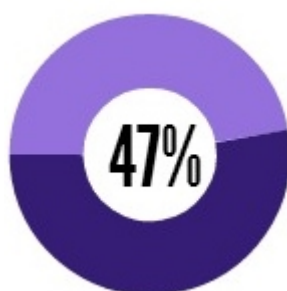


Figure 54: Percentage of Principals who Feel Accountable to School Boards and the Ministry of Education

Approximately 35% of principals perceived that they were most accountable to their teaching faculty. Nearly 20% of principals mentioned feeling most accountable to themselves because they have high expectations for themselves. Being accountable to the taxpayers and the larger community was also mentioned by nearly 20% of principals. Finally, four principals interviewed mentioned being accountable to their God, or their own family.

Section Five – Recommendations and Conclusion

This section offers recommendations for research and practice that have emerged from this study, as well as a conclusion that provides some final thoughts on this research. Both the recommendations and conclusion are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

Recommendations. While the principals interviewed for this research were mainly positive about the OLF and their work overall, some recurring themes from the data indicate that there are areas in which principals need support, and consideration needs to be given regarding how best to give that support. Based on the key study findings, a number of recommendations can be drawn. The majority of recommendations presented centre around the Ministry's role of supporting ongoing professional learning for principals, while the rest address other supports that go beyond professional learning. These later recommendations consider the principals' roles and how they carry out their work. Lastly, this study also recommends that further research be conducted to inform principals' work.

Professional Development. Principals in this study indicated four main areas where continued and additional professional learning support was required. These areas included dealing with student mental health, understanding and implementing equitable and inclusive education, effectively utilizing information and communication technology, and managing school finances.

1. Dealing with student mental health.

The findings indicate that student mental health is a significant school-level issue that influences the nature of principals' work. Forty-five principals mentioned requiring additional skills or knowledge necessary to deal with student mental health. We recommend that the Ministry develop targeted supports and professional development that allow principals to successfully address this issue at their school sites.

2. Understanding and implementing equitable and inclusive education.

More than half of the principals interviewed for this study (40 of 70) mentioned having a broad understanding of diversity that goes beyond the visible to also include visible dimensions of diversity like socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation. However, 20 principals still identified diversity by referring solely to visible differences between people. Few principals interviewed were able to demonstrate a connection between their leadership practices and equitable and inclusive education. We recommend the Ministry further develop the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) to provide opportunities for principals to go deeper, and attempt to ensure that all principals in the province not only possess a nuanced understanding of diversity, but also act upon that knowledge to make their schools inclusive for all.

3. Utilizing e-mail and working remotely.

Approximately an equal number of principals mentioned that the increased presence of information and communications technology has made their work easier and more convenient, or done the opposite and seemingly made their job more demanding. While some younger, less experienced principals described themselves as being "tech-savvy," most experienced principals discussed tech-related challenges they faced on a daily basis. We recommend the Ministry explore this issue further to determine how principals can be

supported in a timely manner as information and communication technology continues to advance at a rapid rate.

4. Managing school finances.

Nearly one third (21 of 70) of the principals interviewed indicated that they required additional professional learning to manage the school's budget or with the other financial aspects of the position. We recommend the Ministry, where applicable, make recommendations for modifications to professional learning opportunities such as the Principal Qualification Program to address principals' desire to learn more about the financial aspects of their work.

Other Kinds of Support. In addition to providing professional learning opportunities for principals, the Ministry provides other kinds of support to principals in their role. We have made 5 additional organizational and policy recommendations that can support principals in improving student achievement.

1. Streamlining policies and procedures.

Principals in this study indicated that they were frustrated because they wanted to take their learning and experience with instruction to support their teaching staff, but were unable to do so to the extent they would like because of other immediate priorities. As indicated in the report, 64% of principals interviewed wanted to spend more time on instructional leadership within their school. We recommend that the Ministry support this desire by streamlining policies and procedures that accompany current policies, and/or reconsider who should carry out some of the procedural/compliance work within the school site so that principals can increase their time engaged in meaningful components of instructional leadership. We also recommend that the Ministry take into consideration the practices documented in this report when considering principals' role and responsibilities in future program initiatives.

2. Addressing principals' mental health.

Almost half of the principals interviewed mentioned being concerned about what their work was doing to their own mental health. We recommend the Ministry consider working collaboratively with the various professional groups that represent principals to find

mutually beneficial solutions to supporting principals in a way that encourages positive health.

3. Further Collaboration with the Ministry of Labour.

Twenty-five of the 70 principals interviewed cited ladder training, shoe inspections, WHMIS, and other occupational health and safety items as creating additional work for them. They also mentioned that occupational health and safety compliance activities prevented them from being in the classroom and spending collaboration time (i.e., staff meetings) with staff. We recommend that the Ministry of Education utilize their working relationship with the Ministry of Labour to consolidate some of the multiple tasks from the Ministry of Labour or designate another person to fulfill this role at school sites.

4. Reconsider what principals are responsible for at the school-level, and determine whether other employees within the school can better attend to any tasks or activities.

Our data analysis, particularly from the school observations, indicates that principals engage in activities outside of their job description in the school for a number of reasons (staff unwilling to participate, confusion regarding who is responsible, tasks outside of teacher duties and expectations). In turn, less time is spent on leading the instructional program and other important activities. We recommend that the Ministry consider the actions in which principals engage on a daily basis to determine whether other employees within the school can better attend any of these tasks.

Conclusion. This report has presented a summary of the key findings from two-phase on principals' work. Thus far, the research has found that principals have a very favourable perception of their profession, with 81% of the sample stating that they loved their job. A number of changes in principals' work were discussed by principals, including those related to demographic shifts, expectations, collaboration amongst educators, and increased occupational health and safety. The surge in the use of information and communications technology, and the increasingly unpredictable nature of the workday were two additional changes that principals mentioned were impacting what they do on a daily basis.

This research also documented how principals spent their time on a daily basis. More than 35% of principals mentioned that they spent the vast majority of their time in

communication with students, teachers, and other stakeholders. Though slightly more than 10% of principals indicated that they spend the vast majority of their time leading instruction at their schools, almost 65% of principals mentioned that they would like to do more instructional leadership. This underscores the importance principals place on being instructional leaders at their school.

Principals indicated having very favourable perceptions of the OLF. Nearly 50% of principals mentioned using the OLF to plan and guide professional learning at their school, with more than 45% using it as a guide to plan and organize their work on a daily basis.

The five domains of the current OLF were used to organize findings related to the practices performed by principals on a daily basis. A number of interesting themes emerged from the data collected. Principals set directions at their schools by leading professional development activities that were aligned with the shared vision of the school and goals of the school board. Principals either led these activities at the school site, or provided staff with release time to pursue similarly aligned professional learning opportunities. Communication, respect, and active listening were the main methods principals used to build relationships with stakeholders in the school community. Over 97% of principals mentioned creating and sustaining a safe and welcoming environment for staff to offer feedback, and support to colleagues as the main strategy used to promote collaboration at the school level. One hundred percent of principals improved the instructional program at their school by observing instruction and offering advice and suggestions to teachers. Nearly half of principals mentioned using and analysing data to monitor student progress. In terms of securing accountability, principals do so by building internal teacher capacity and maintaining transparency with external parties.

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Appendix A:

The Nature of School Administrators Work

Principal Interview Questions

1. I know there are really no typical days in administration, but can you give me a general description of a basic administrative day? (for example, if you met someone who knew nothing about your work, how would describe what you do?)
2. In terms of time, what would you say you spend most of your time doing? (and why?)
3. Are there others things (actions, activities) that you would like to be engaged in or feel that you should be engaged in and are not? Or are there things you would like to be doing more of? Follow-up: what is preventing you from engaging in these activities? (this should lead to some of the challenges they face)
4. What are some of the competing priorities that you face? And why?
5. What directions are you setting for your school? And how are you going about setting these?
6. Everyone I speak to says leadership is all about relationships. Do you agree?...How do you go about building relationships and supporting people? What are some of the challenges you've encountered in trying to build relationships or in supporting people? (from the responses direct the conversation to the emotional aspect of their work – probe for how they deal with others and their emotions and their own emotions and how they read a situation)
7. How do you go about building a collaborative culture? What are some of the challenges you encounter when trying to build a collaborative culture? (if the opportunity arises in this question to probe about the emotional aspect of the work then take the opportunity)
8. What is your role in improving the instructional program at your school? And how do you go about doing this? What are some of the challenges you have encountered in trying to improve instructional programs in your school?
9. Who do you feel you're accountable to? And how do you go about securing accountability?
10. What do you think are your strengths in problem solving? And what has challenged you when problem-solving?
11. After a tough, emotionally draining day at work, how do you remain optimistic about your role.
12. How have advances in communication technology influenced your work?
13. How has the increased awareness of student diversity influenced the work you do?
14. How has the changing educational agenda influenced your work (increased parental involvement, economy focused education, new systems of accountability)?
15. So we've touched on several key aspects of leadership that school principal's exercise. These aspects are all indicators in the Ontario Leadership Framework. What are your thoughts of this framework? Has it been useful in your work? (if no, ask why not and if

yes, ask how)

16. Is your work different than this framework presumes? (If yes, explore how and if no, ask why not).

17. *Has there been a change in your work since you first became an administrator? If yes, in what ways and why?

*ask only if the person is an experienced principal – five years or more

18. Is there anything that you would like to add?