Elementary Principals’ and Vice- Principals’ Workload Study

Final Report

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1. Purposes for the Study

Considerable research indicates that the practices and “personal resources” or dispositions of principals and vice-principals explain a significant amount of variation in the success of school improvement efforts\(^1\); leadership practices directly aimed at improving the instructional program in schools\(^2\), along with dispositions such as optimism, efficacy, and resilience\(^3\) underlie much of this explanatory power.

While most principals and vice-principals seem to appreciate the value of orienting their efforts toward instructional improvement and student learning, managing the unavoidable operational demands on their working time, as well, has proven to be an exceedingly “sticky” problem. The best of intentions notwithstanding, evidence indicates that operational demands, significant in their own right\(^4\), typically eat up about 90% of most principals’ and vice-principals’ time\(^5\). If substantially more of the potential contribution of principals and vice-principals to school improvement is to be realized, we need to better understand the sources of principal and vice-principal workload, how principals and vice-principals make sense of that workload, and which features of their working context have a significant bearing on such sense making. We also need to be much clearer about how excessive workload demands might be ameliorated so that more time is available for leaders to focus on the challenges of school improvement. Filling these gaps in our knowledge in the Ontario context was the purpose of this study\(^6\).

\(^1\) For example, see Leithwood et al (2004) and Day et al (2010). Most of the research linking school leadership to student learning has been conducted with principals- vice-principal work being viewed as an extension of principals’ work.

\(^2\) See Robinson et al (2009 ), for example.

\(^3\) The Ontario Leadership Framework provides evidence about the importance of these and other leadership “resources”.


\(^6\) A more detailed outline of the study’s purposes can be found in the Terms of Reference (2013).
2. Framework for the Study

The initial framework for the study identified four sources of principal and vice-principal sense making about their workload; such sense making was conceptualized as influencing both the day-to-day work of principal and vice-principals, as well as their emotional responses to their workload\(^7\). This framework was substantially refined and extended, however, in response to reviews of research conducted during the early stages of the project and results of the principal and vice-principal interview data. Summarized in Figure 1.1, the final framework was explicitly used to design the principal and vice-principal survey, as well as to organize and interpret many of the results outlined later in this report.

A testable causal model, Figure 1.1 identifies the sense principals and vice-principals make of their workload - their perceptions of the extent of their workload - as the outcome or Dependent Variable in the model. Principals’ and vice-principals’ workload sense making is moderated (influenced) by, for example, the extent of students’ disadvantage (the more special support is required for students, the greater the workload perceived by principals and vice-principals).

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\(^7\) Leithwood (2013)
Principal and vice-principal sense making about their workload is mediated (explained) by their sense of both individual and collective efficacy, as well as their job and career satisfaction. The status of these Mediating Variables is a consequence of principal and vice-principal workload conceptualized as the Independent Variables in the model, each of which is an external manifestation of one of three “latent” or underlying variables – role ambiguity, role conflict, and (lack of) social support.

**Independent Variables**

Explicit sources of principal and vice-principal workload identified through the interviews conducted in the first stage of this study are the Independent Variables in Figure 1.1 (e.g., staff, school organization, school system). Building on a recent line of research\(^8\), each of these original categories of workload sources have been further interpreted through three underlying lenses used by principals and vice-principals to view - or make sense of - each source of their workload - Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict or lack of Social Support.

- **Role Ambiguity or Clarity**: aspects of the principal and vice-principal role or context that are confusing or unclear (e.g., uncertainty about how much authority one has), contributing to perceptions of additional workload, or aspects of the role or context that clarify for principals and vice-principals what and/or how to carry out their work, contributing to perceptions of the work as manageable. Ambiguity makes principal and vice-principal sense making about their role more difficult, whereas clarity simplifies that sense making.

- **Role Conflict or Coherence**: aspects of the principal and vice-principal role or context that introduce competing work conditions or expectations (e.g., being required to initiate something in their schools without the human or other resources that are needed), contributing to perceptions of additional workload, or aspects of the role and context that reinforce principals’ and vice-principals’ understanding of the work required to do their jobs well and how manageable is that work. Conflict makes principal and vice-principal sense making about their work more difficult, whereas coherence simplifies their sense making.

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\(^8\) This research is most recently represented by Bauer & Brazer (2013)
• **Extent and nature of Social Support:** aspects of the principal and vice-principals’ social context that are perceived as offering some form of cognitive or emotional assistance to carry out the job effectively. Evidence points to four types of social support including (a) reassurances of worth, (b) reliable alliances such as peer networks, (c) guidance of the sort an effective supervisory officer might provide, for example, and (d) opportunities for professional development or nurturance\(^9\). The greater principal and vice-principals’ access to these forms of social support, the more manageable the work is perceived to be; restricted access contributes to a sense of workload being unmanageable. Social support has been found to be especially important for novice-principals and vice-principals\(^{10}\) - perhaps as many as 30% of the school administration cohort in any given year\(^{11}\).

**Mediating Variables**

According to Figure 1.1, increased levels of role conflict and ambiguity, along with diminished or inadequate levels of social support result in reduced levels of both efficacy and job satisfaction, the Mediating Variables in the study. A variable is classified as a mediator when it helps explain the nature and/or strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Variation in both efficacy and job satisfaction, Figure 1.1 indicates, will have a significant influence on principal and vice-principal perceptions of their workload.

*Individual and collective efficacy.* Research on leader efficacy, in general\(^{12}\) and principal and vice-principal efficacy, in particular\(^{13}\) associates such efficacy with both effective leadership practices, as well as organizational performance - student achievement in the case of principals and vice-principals. Leaders’ efficacy has also been associated with several of the moderators in Figure 1.1 including school size and school level, potentially represented by “grade configuration” in Figure 1.1. As Bandura explains:

> Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives . . . efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples’ choice of activities, how much effort

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\(^9\) Bell (2006) and Varvel et al. (2007)
\(^{10}\) Bauer & Brazier (2013),
\(^{11}\) ODoherty & Ovanda (2013)
\(^{12}\) Chemers, et al, 2000
\(^{13}\) Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008
they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations.\textsuperscript{14}

Levels of efficacy depend on clarity about one’s job, expectations about having opportunities to enact tasks central to one’s job\textsuperscript{15}, one’s ability to influence what goes on in the work environment through effort and persistence, and the malleability of the environment itself\textsuperscript{16}. Sources of both role conflict and ambiguity, therefore, are likely to have direct negative effects on levels of principal and vice-principal efficacy, as will lack of social support and this is likely to result in higher levels of perceived workload on the part of principals and vice-principals. The survey includes two reliable, multi-item scales measuring individual and collective efficacy adopted from the study of principal and vice-principal efficacy alluded to above.

\textit{Job satisfaction}. Research on job satisfaction in many sectors is both extensive and longstanding\textsuperscript{17}. In general, the outcome of that research supports the not very surprising claim that satisfied workers perform at higher levels than those who are less satisfied\textsuperscript{18}. Results of research on principal and vice-principal job satisfaction, entirely aligned with this general finding\textsuperscript{19}, support the assumption that those features of principal and vice-principals’ work environment that create role conflict, role ambiguity or fail to provide sufficient social support will significantly diminish principal and vice-principal job satisfaction. As Bauer and Brazer\textsuperscript{20} explain, for example, evidence indicates that “role ambiguity and role conflict are among the most potent predictors of job satisfaction”. Wexler\textsuperscript{21} also found that job satisfaction was inversely related to role conflict for all principals, role conflict was inversely related to age, and longer experience leads to more job satisfaction. According to Figure 1.1, higher levels of job satisfaction, as well as efficacy, generate more manageable perceptions of workload and more positive emotions related to that workload.

The survey includes a seven-item scale developed by Bauer and Brazer to measure both

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} Bandura, 1997a, p.77
\textsuperscript{15} Fisher (2014) introduced the term “conditional control” to help explain the variation in sense of efficacy found in his study with principals in Israel.
\textsuperscript{16} Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008
\textsuperscript{17} Lock et al, 1988
\textsuperscript{18} Chambers, 1999
\textsuperscript{19} Wexler & Eckman, 2004
\textsuperscript{20} 2013, p. 169
\textsuperscript{21} 2004, p, 308
\end{footnotesize}
job satisfaction and the closely-related concept of career satisfaction including items such as “how satisfied are you with the chance your job gives you to do what you are best at?” and “how satisfied are you with the opportunity you have to contribute to important decisions?”

**Moderating Variables**

A variable is classified as a “moderator” when it influences the direction or strength of an independent variable (a “cause” of something) on a dependent variable (an “effect” or outcome). For example, principals’ perceptions of the extent to which initiatives from outside their school influence their workload may vary from not much to very significant depending on their experience. Long experienced principals may have learned how to buffer themselves and their schools from excessive numbers of external initiatives that distract them from their school improvement goals whereas relatively new principals may feel obligated to implement almost everything that is suggested to them by the province or their districts.

Figure 1.1 identifies seven variables acting as moderators in this study. All seven of these moderators were identified as having an influence on principal and vice-principal workload in the interview data collected during the first phase of the study. In addition, most have also been identified as consequential in previous research, for example:

- proportion of students in the school who are disadvantaged or require extra support (e.g., Ulrich & Bauer, 2011);
- extent to which student misbehavior is perceived to be a challenge in the school (e.g., Ulrich & Bauer, 2011);
- proportion of students whose tested achievement is below standard (e.g., DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003);
- school size, either too small or too big, are associated with both workload and student achievement challenges (e.g., Leithwood, 2009);
- grade configuration of the school (no previous evidence yet located on this variable);
- location of the school: both fully urban and fully rural locations appear to have the greatest influence on principal and vice-principal workload (indirect evidence reported by Young, 1998, for example);
years of principal and vice-principal experience: less experience is associated with greater uncertainty about the job leading to greater workload and the associated emotional stress (e.g., Wexler, 2004; O’Doherty and Ovando, 2013).

**Dependent or Outcome Variables**

Our account of the three underlying variables helping to explain perceptions of workload, mediated by principal efficacy and job satisfaction, depend on the concept of “manageability”. Principal and vice-principal perceptions of workload vary along a continuum ranging from manageable to unmanageable depending on the extent to which principals and vice-principals view the work as ambiguous or clear, presenting them with conflicting or coherent priorities and expectations, and the degree to which social support is available for doing the work. So the central conception of workload in this study is an individual social construction.

Workload, it might be argued, can also be conceived of as an objective phenomenon. From this point of view, for example, workload is about the actual number of hours principals and vice-principals are observed to work, the number of tasks they are observed to perform, the number of interactions they are observed to have over the course of a day, the volume of decisions required in a week and the like. An objective conception of workload might also include the complexity of the work (e.g., number of steps in the procedures used to solve problems) and the difficulty of the work (e.g., the proportion of challenges or problems faced in a selected period of time that require novel as compared with already-mastered responses).

Such an objective conception of workload, however, is more subjective than surface appearances suggest. High levels of domain-specific knowledge (expertise), perhaps acquired through relevant, repeated, experience, make objectively complicated work subjectively easy - or at least not very difficult – for those possessing such knowledge. Furthermore, with increasing levels of such expertise comes “automaticity”, the ability to quickly solve problems with minimum expenditures of time and cognitive energy.22

The outcome or Dependent Variable in this study is principal and vice-principal workload conceived of as an individual social construction – principals’ and vice-principals’ perceptions of their workload - both “cognitive” estimates of the amount of workload and “emotional” responses to such workload. Cognitive estimates of workload include overall perceptions of its

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22 For background evidence about these features of expertise, see Leithwood & Steinbach (1995)
manageability, varying from “light” to “frequently unmanageable”, as well as estimates of the number of hours worked both in and out of school. In this case, the assumption is that if you think you work many more hours than you do, the cognitive and emotional effect is the same whether or not you are “objectively” correct. Emotional responses to workload include judgments of the extent to which workload invokes positive emotions such as enjoyment, along with negative emotions such as frustration.

According to Figure 1.1, both types of perceived outcomes or “sense making” about the job will vary significantly in response to the status of principal and vice-principal efficacy and job satisfaction, along with the moderating variables identified in Figure 1.1.
3. Research Methods

3.1 Design

A two-staged, mixed-methods design was used for this study including the initial collection of qualitative interview data followed by the collection of quantitative survey data. This design aimed to achieve the internal validity associated with qualitative methods, that is, relatively in-depth accounts of the phenomenon of interest, along with the external validity associated with quantitative methods, that is, estimates of how representative are the results across the entire population of interest.

Qualitative and quantitative data can be mixed (or ordered) in several different ways; the province’s teacher workload study, for example, employs these methods in reverse order to this study\(^\text{23}\). This study began with the collection of qualitative interview data because existing evidence did not provide sufficiently “robust” responses to the questions it was designed to answer.

3.2 Interviews

Sample. As Table 1 indicates, phone interviews were conducted with 102 principals and vice-principals representing Ontario’s three principals’ associations. This sampling plan reflects potential workload-related differences created by regional contexts (northern, south/central east and south/central west), as well as differences in language and religion (Francophone, Catholic, Public). A data triangulation strategy was also used at the interview stage of the study, in addition to principal and vice-principals interviews:

- one focus group interview was conducted with a selected sample of 10 trustees from across the province nominated by Ontario School Boards’ Associations;
- focus group interview data were collected from 65 Directors of Education at the annual meeting of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE);

Data collection. Phone interviews, typically lasting about one hour, were conducted using the questions included in Appendix A (English and French versions). These interviews were conducted in either English or French depending on the preferences of the interviewees. The main questions in the protocol were provided to all interviewees in advance of the interview.

\(^{23}\) Ungerleider (2014)
These qualitative data supplement existing evidence in several different ways: they identify factors related to principal and vice-principal workload that had not emerged from previous research and estimate the relative salience, in the Ontario context, of factors identified in previous research. The concern in this case was with the sensitivity of evidence to the context in which Ontario P/VPs work\textsuperscript{24}. Quantitative survey data was then used to test the relative importance and representativeness of the interview findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>North (NOEL)</th>
<th>South/Central East</th>
<th>South/Central West</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P/VP OPC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/VP CPCO</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/VP ADFO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/SO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Provincial focus groups (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustees</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Provincial focus group (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The trustee focus group was conducted in person and audio recorded in a central Toronto location. Questions guiding the survey are evident in the report of results (Section 6).

A procedure for collecting data from directors of education was developed in collaboration with members of the CODE executive. This procedure entailed organizing all directors of education in attendance at their association’s annual general meeting into 8 focus groups of from 4 to 10 people each. Questions evident in the report of results (Section 7) were provided to each participant and a handwritten record of the interview was kept by one member of each group.

Data analysis. A detailed précis was developed for responses to each of the main interview questions for principals and vice-principals, trustees, directors and Ministry officials. A written record of the trustee focus group was returned to all participants for a member check. The volume of data resulting from the 102 principal and vice-principal interviews required considerable additional synthesis. At the core of this synthesizing work was the coding and counting of specific responses to each of the main questions using a series of tables which:

- listed all specific, non-overlapping responses to each main question;

\textsuperscript{24} The technical term for this concern is “ecological validity”.

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recorded the number of interviewees identifying each different response; and
identified the provincial principal association of each respondent.

These tables, included as Appendix C, are referred to extensively in the reporting of principal and vice-principal interview results in Section 4.

3.3 Surveys

Sample. All members of the three principal associations were invited, using their individual email addresses, to respond to an online version of the survey (Appendices F1 and F2). The total elementary principal and vice-principal membership, and therefore the maximum possible number of responses from each association, were as follows:

- Ontario Principals’ Council = 3598
- Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario = 1395
- Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes = 315 (principals of both elementary schools and K-12 schools)

In order for the actual number of survey responses to be considered representative of these three principal populations (with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5) the number of responses required from each of the associations is as follows:

- Ontario Principals’ Council = 536
- Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario = 420
- Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes = 173

The achieved sample sizes, substantially in excess of these requirements, were as follows:

- Ontario Principals’ Council = 1592 (a 44% response rate)
- Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario = 756 (a 54% response rate)
- Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes = 203 (a 64% response rate)

Data collection. The online survey, both English and French versions (Appendix B), was created and used to collect data aimed at testing the framework summarized in Figure 1.1, as well as answering several key questions lying outside of the framework. All questions in the survey were closed; respondents selected answers from a fixed list developed primarily from the results of the principal and vice-principal interviews collected during the first stage of the study. A small number of multi-item scales were added as a result of the literature review. These scales
are included in the section of the survey measuring principal and vice-principal job satisfaction and both individual and collective principal and vice-principal efficacy, the “mediating variables” in Figure 1.1.

Data analysis. Responses to the survey were first summarized in the form of means and standard deviations for each item and for each multi-item scale. Factor analysis was used to test the underlying structure of the survey variables and scale reliabilities were calculated (Cronbach’s Alpha). These descriptive analyses will likely serve the interests of many of those with a stake in the project and will be the only form in which results of some of the survey questions are reported, specifically those not directly associated with the framework (how principals and vice-principals cope with their workload; the extent to which principal and vice-principal workload influences the recruitment of potential school leadership aspirants; and how principal and vice-principal work can become more productive). Path analysis was conducted with all evidence directly related to the framework.
4. Principal and Vice principal Interview Results

Results of phone interviews with 102 principals and vice principals randomly selected from three different regions of the province and the three different provincial principals’ association, are reported in this section. The nature of this reporting was determined by our position on two key questions about interview data analysis and reporting. One of these questions is to what extent should the number of interviewees providing similar answers to the same question influence what is reported (as distinct from a largely qualitative description of responses).

There is a longstanding debate in the research literature about this question; a debate which hinges on the purposes to be served by the research. The present study of principal and vice principal workload is clearly intended to inform policy. Furthermore, most policies are primarily designed to govern the actions of the many, while exceptions to policy are designed to govern the actions of the few. So the policy intentions of this study, we argue, place a premium on knowing how many people provided the same answer to most of the questions asked as part of the interviews. Of course, reporting frequencies of responses need not exclude additional efforts to deepen understanding about the meaning of especially those answers provided by relatively large numbers of interviewees; the report contributes modestly to that objective by recording relatively extensive, rather than abbreviated, précis of responses from the interviewees.25

Having chosen to focus especially on the frequencies of responses, an unavoidable follow up question is: How many respondents need to provide a similar answer for that answer to be considered noteworthy? As the tabular summaries of responses to the interview questions indicate (Appendix C), all questions generated many answers. But there was wide variation in the numbers of respondents identifying any single answer. Many answers were provided by only one or several people while as many as half of the 102 respondents agreed on several answers to some questions. Our approach on this question was to highlight in the narrative portion of this section, answers that had been provided by at least 20% of respondents from all principals’ associations combined, or 20% of respondents from at least one of the three associations; we

25 An original digital audio record was kept of each interview, along with detailed notes, should additional levels of analysis be desirable.
assumed there might be important differences among members of the three associations worth highlighting. Appendix C reports all answers to all questions.

Much of what was learned from these hour-long interviews helped develop the framework for the study summarized in Figure 1.1 (and the substance of the survey portion of the study). While the final form of the framework was not available when the interview questions were being developed and administered, this report of the interview results is organized, as much as possible around the Independent and Moderating categories of variables described in the framework in order to maintain as much coherence as possible between the interview and survey results. Responses to additional sets of questions not part of the framework are also summarized at the end of this section.

4.1 Independent Variables: Sources of Principals’ and Vice-principals’ Workload

A detailed outline of the sources of workload reported by the 102 principals who were interviewed can be found in Appendix C, Tables 1-12. Each table includes sources of workload associated with one of the 9 independent variables identified in the Framework (e.g., staff, school system). The left column of each of these tables lists unique categories of responses (unique sources of workload associated with one independent variable), the percentage and number of respondents who identified each source from each of the three principals’ associations (middle three columns) and the total number and percentage of respondents who identified each source.

Five interview questions asked about respondents’ school improvement initiatives, what the research contract refers to as their “professional” work. The first and second of these questions were aimed at better understanding the purpose and nature of those initiatives, while the third question aimed to unpack the consequences of those efforts for principals’ and vice principals’ workload. The fourth question asked about external initiatives that enter the school sometimes detracting from, or not adding much value to, their school improvement priorities. Factors to consider when faced with the implementation of an initiative from the ministry or school system was the fifth question.
Focus of Respondents’ School Improvement Efforts (Appendix C, Table 1)

This question asked about the primary student outcomes that their school improvement efforts were intended to achieve, as well as the main strategies being used to foster that achievement. Respondents identified 26 sets of student outcomes, although some clearly overlap or are a subset of others (e.g., 21st Century Learning and critical thinking). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of respondents’ school improvement efforts are aimed at improving either math skills (55% overall, 62% CPCO, 53% OPC and 42% ADFO) or reading (33% overall, 38% CPCO, 25% OPC and 50% ADFO). About 22% of respondents identified writing as their main school improvement goal.

Many strategies were identified by respondents as part of their school improvement efforts, but none garnered large numbers of adherents. Developing SMART goals and Success Criteria, providing descriptive feedback and initiating Collaborative Inquiry processes were the most frequently identified strategies.

Deciding On The School Improvement Focus For The Year (Appendix C, Table 2)

While respondents provided a list of some 15 different approaches or structures through which their school improvement focus was determined, the most frequent responses were a school improvement team (25% overall, 28% CPCO, 27% OPC, 0% ADFO), full staff deliberation (39% overall, 31% CPCO, 45% OPC and 42% ADFO) or analysis of EQAO results along with related data such as report cards (63% overall, 67% CPCO, 57% OPC and 75% ADFO) which might also be carried out by a school improvement team or staff as a whole. Underlying most of these responses was a relatively participative approach to determining school improvement plans; in only four cases did principals assume sole decision making authority, and in these cases the principals’ initial decisions were subsequently vetted by staff.

Implications For Workload Of Taking On Ambitious Improvement Goal

(Appendix C, Table 3)

Interviewees were asked to identify the workload implications of taking on ambitious improvement goals such as those they identified in response to the two previous questions. Results pointed to three such implications, of 37 in total, as especially consequential for their workload:
- Significant effort required to build the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals. This implication was identified by 25% of respondents as a whole (21% CPCO, 31% OPC and 17% ADFO).
- Significant effort on the part of principals and vice principals to develop the capacities they need to lead the school improvement initiatives (e.g., ensuring the productive functioning of PLCs). This addition to workload was identified by 27% of respondents as a whole (38% CPCO, 25% OPC and 0% ADFO).
- Allocating the time needed for school improvement work (e.g., planning around multiple goals) while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively. This was an answer provided by 22% of respondents overall (28% CPCO, 20% OPC and 8% ADFO).

**External Initiatives Detracting From, Or Not Adding Value To, School Improvement Priorities** (Appendix C, Table 4)

Interviewees identified almost forty external initiatives that they viewed as distractions from their work or not adding value to their school improvement efforts. However, only one of these achieved the threshold of significance (frequency of responses) warranting mention here:

- Excessive numbers of initiatives from the Ministry of Education, initiatives lacking connection to one another, switching from one initiative to the next rapidly, frustration with lack of clear direction on roll out (23% overall, 18% CPCO, 31% OPC, 0% ADFO). This response likely includes initiatives from both the province and interviewees’ school systems.

**Factors To Consider When Implementing A New Provincial Or Board Initiative** (Appendix C, Table 5)

Interviewees identified almost three dozen factors they thought should be considered when they were faced with a request to implement a new provincial or board initiative. Most of these factors were identified by a relatively small number of respondents. However, three factors were identified much more frequently than the rest. These included:

- The number of initiatives already underway in their school (28% overall, 28% CPCO, 33% OPC, 8% ADFO).
- The degree to which existing initiatives were being implemented in their school (15% overall, 23% CPCO, 12% OPC, 0% ADFO).
- The match between newly proposed initiatives and the school’s improvement goals and priorities; “schools are at different places and have different needs”. This factor was mentioned especially by ADFO members (12% overall, 5% CPCO, 10% OPC, 42% ADFO).
- Time required by principal/vice principal to implement, manage, and ensure new initiative will be sustained (34% overall, 38% CPCO, 39% OPC, 0% ADFO).

**School Staff** (Appendix C, Table 6)

Two features of a school staff which make the administrators’ workload more manageable were especially noteworthy in the responses of principals and vice principals:

- High performing office staff, teaching staff and members of the leadership team. These staff members are eager to “chip in” and support each other and embrace professional development. Forty-three percent of respondents, as a whole, identified this source of workload (49% CPCO, 39% OPC and 42% ADFO).
- High levels of trust among staff and between staff and both principals and vice principals. This source was identified by 19% of respondents as a whole (28% CPCO, 16% OPC and 0% ADFO).

Three features of school staffs that interviewees believed added to their workload included:

- New staff members and teachers new to their role. When this is the case, for example, the principal or vice principal has to do performance appraisals for LTO on NTIP, pair new staff with mentors, provide coaching, monitor new staff’s progress, support them as they deal with difficult students for the first time. Thirty-six percent of respondents, as a whole, identified this as a significant addition to their workload (21% CPCO, 45% OPC and 50% ADFO).
- Resistance of some mid- and late-career staff members to implementing practices called for by the school improvement plan or to the need to be mentored in order to make such changes. This addition to workload was identified by 34% of all respondents (28% CPCO, 31% OPC and 67% ADFO).
• Time and effort required to build high levels of trust among staff members and between staff and principals and vice principals. Fifteen percent of respondents overall identified this as a significant addition to workload (23% CPCO, 12% OPC and 0% ADFO).

Unions (Appendix C, Table 7)

Six conditions associated with unions were reported as having an impact, either positive (one condition) negative (5 conditions) or both (1 condition) on school administrators’ workloads. Positive effects identified by at least 20% of respondents from one principal association were associated with:

• Contracts which help when they serve as guidelines for principals during decision making (e.g. time tabling) and grievances. Thirteen percent of respondents as a whole spoke about the positive effects of this condition (23% CPCO, 8% OPC and 0% ADFO).

Identified as having a negative effect on workload were:

• Contracts which prevent staff from being flexible and willing to support kids (21% of all respondents, 23% CPCO, 20% OPC and 17% ADFO).

• Regulation 274, occasional teacher legislation that, for example, requires principals and vice principals to keep up with changes in hiring processes, and be out of their buildings to interview prospective staff. Regulation 274 was considered a significant addition to workload by 23% of respondents, as a whole, (28% CPCO, 18% OPC and 25% ADFO). Regulation 274 was identified in response to several other questions although it is only identified in this section. Principals and vice principals considered it a very significant factor in their workload, much more than the percentages reported here suggest.

• Safety in school is compromised by limits on supervision. An 80-minute limit on duty scheduling means some principals and vice principals may be doing yard supervision before and after school hours. Thirty-nine percent of all respondents identified this condition (46% CPCO, 41% OPC and 8% ADFO).

• Limits on professional development (once a month) hinders school activities and increases workload (e.g., by requiring meetings with small groups of people when
they are willing, chasing after staff). Twenty-seven percent of respondents spoke to this issue (10% CPCO, 45% OPC and 8% ADFO).

One condition associated with unions had negative effects initially but became positive in the long run:

- A key feature of the teacher contract is about timetabling and ensuring everybody receives fair and equitable preparation time and teaching load (even more difficult scheduling with French and English panel). This also applies to supervision schedules (e.g., duty schedules have to be aligned with safety) and it takes time earlier on to schedule. But once done, this helps to reduce workload. This feature was identified by 24% of respondents, as a whole (28% CPCO, 18% OPC and 33% ADFO).

**School Board/System/District** (Appendix C, Table 8)

While the school district or system was responsible for more than 50 distinct sources of workload, there was very little consensus about those sources; many were identified by only one or several respondents. Indeed, only three of the more than 50 sources were identified by the minimum number of respondents to meet our threshold for attention in this section of the report. The first of these sources, viewed as positive, was:

- A supportive central office staff that facilitates administrative work in schools. Many examples of what it meant to be supportive were provided, for example, open and fluid relationships with superintendents and the director, awareness of the needs of the school, being very responsive and listening carefully to the views of school administrators, supportive of the principal’s role, supporting data use in schools, and giving principals release time. This response was provided by 31% of interviewees overall (33% CPCO, 35% OPC and 8% ADFO).

The two sources meeting our reporting threshold viewed as having negative effects on workload included:

- Large amounts of required documentation including the preparation of various reports. This was primarily a concern to ADFO members. Fifteen percent of principals overall reported this challenge (10% CPCO, 8% OPC and 58% ADFO)
- Too many memos and emails from the district which increase workload and distract principals and vice principals. According to interviewees, these emails are sometimes
not timely and result in school administrators becoming reactive as opposed to being proactive. Twenty-two percent of respondents overall held this view (13% CPCO, 31% OPC and 8% ADFO).

**Provincial Ministries** (Appendix C, Table 9)

Eight influences on workload associated with provincial ministries were viewed as having a positive influence, one of which was identified by enough respondents to be described here:

- Clear policy on progressive discipline and bullying and growing success which make work easier. This positive influence on workload was identified by a total of 15% of respondents (28% CPCO, 8% OPC and 0% ADFO).

While thirty-nine sources of workload associated with provincial ministries were viewed as having a negative effect on workload, only four attracted a significant number of respondents:

- The time-consuming nature of administering occupational health and safety regulations, especially the time involved in follow-up reports (36% of respondents overall, 26% CPCO, 35% OPC and 75% ADFO).

- Heavy documentation involved in violence in the workplace, and all forms associated with health and safety and lock-down policies. While interviewees viewed these policies as important, they also add significantly to workload and it takes time to complete the training involved to understand each new initiative. These views were held by 24% of all respondents (26% CPCO, 27% OPC and 0% ADFO).

- Regulation 274 was mentioned in response to many of the interview questions. In this case it was associated with “Staffing procedures designed by senior management to comply, which influence operational issues at school level if the wrong person is hired”. Regulation 274, interviewees asserted, “adds an incredible amount of workload for admins, tasks to manage LTOs, conducting LTO interviews, doing performance appraisals – challenging to deal with the union if a wrong person gets hired – very frustrating; principals are getting staff placed in their building so principal must work extra hard with unskilled teachers). This regulation is a source of much frustration.” (43% of respondents overall, 28% CPCO, 55% OPC and 42% ADFO).
• Progressive discipline and bullying investigations, interviews, guidelines to follow.
  Nineteen percent of respondents overall identified this source of workload (31% CPCO, 4% OPC and 42% ADFO).

Own Capacities and Experiences (Appendix C, Table 11)

  Asked about whether their own “capacities, preferences, experiences and the like” influenced their workload, interviewees identified some 17 personal qualities positively influencing their workload, and 28 which influenced their workload negatively; none of the latter were mentioned by more than several people, however.

  Among the positive personal qualities mentioned, three were identified especially frequently:

  • Experience in the role: long experience as principal generates confidence in the ability to carry out the role. Experiences inform practices and often increase the autonomy one has to make decisions. Experience has also resulted in a balance of work and family life (32% overall, 28% CPCO, 29% OPC and 58% ADFO).

  • High expectations: a strong desire to do the very best job that principals or vice principals can drives their work to ensure their schools are well run (20% overall, 28% CPCO, 18% OPC and 20% ADFO).

  • Skill in building relationships: especially when transitioning to a new building there is much work involved in building new relationships, getting to know community partners and the like (16% overall, 21% CPCO, 16% OPC and 0% ADFO).

Advisory Work out of School (Appendix C, Table 12)

  Interviewees were asked to what extent they initiated or participated in advisory or consultative work for their districts or with the ministry and how that influences their workload. This question generated 23 sets of answers. One of the 23 expressed positive views about the consequences of such work without too much concern about workload. Such work:

  • Contributes to professional learning and provides opportunities to understand education in the system and province (25% overall, 36% CPCO, 20% OPC and 17% ADFO). One of the 23 answers, especially from OPC members, reflected a concern about adding excessively to workload. This was:
• Time spent at the board level attending meetings which takes time away from the building, increases workload and interferes with teaching and administration time (27% overall, 21% CPCO, 33% OPC and 25% ADFO).

Twelve percent of respondents said they had been asked by their superintendent to stay away from joining committees when they assumed a new role (26% CPCO, 4% OPC and 0% ADFO).

**Summary**

By way of summary, Table 4.1 ranks the 20 variables contributing most to workload, no matter the category of independent variable they represent. This table is limited to sources of workload identified by at least 20% of interviewees, as a whole; it includes 5 variables that contribute positively to workload followed by 12 that have a negative effect.26

### Table 4.1

**Variables Contributing Most to Principal and Vice Principal Workload**

**Interview Results**

(Identified by at least 20% of respondents overall)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Positive Influences on Workload</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td>1. High performing office staff, teaching staff and leadership team; eager staff that chip in and support each other and embrace PD – helps with workload</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Capacities, Preferences, Experiences</td>
<td>2. Experience in the role (long experience as principal generates confidence in ability to carry out the role – experiences inform practices) – autonomy to make decisions – experience has resulted in a balance in work and family life</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System/District</td>
<td>3. Supportive central office staff facilitate admins work (e.g., open and fluid relationships with SOs and director – aware of the needs of the school, very responsive and listen; district is supportive of principal’s role – supports data use in schools, giving Ps release time)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Work</td>
<td>4. Contributes to professional learning and provides opportunities to understand education in the system and province</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 Although not mentioned by many respondents, one member of the project advisory committee noted the following challenge for administrators in schools with significant proportions of special education students:

...my experience is that the growing number of high needs special education students is very time consuming for administrators. Dealing with the emotional aspect of staff who are exposed to aggressive acts that require they wear kevlar, time spent addressing concerns from other parents, time spent debriefing staff all adds up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own Capacities, Preferences, Experiences</td>
<td>5. High expectations (strong desire to do the very best job that the principal can drives principals’ work to ensure school is well run)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Negative Influences on Workload</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province/Unions</td>
<td>6. Regulation 274 and the staffing procedures designed by senior management to comply (these procedures influence operational issues at school level if the wrong person is hired. Regulation 274 adds an incredible amount of workload for admins, tasks to manage LTOs, conducting LTO interviews, doing performance appraisals – challenging to deal with the union if a wrong person gets hired - very frustrating; principals are getting staff placed in their building so principal must work extra hard with unskilled teachers.) This regulation is a source of much frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>7. Safety in school is compromised by limits on supervision - 80-minute limit on duty scheduling means P/VP may be doing yard supervision before and after school hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td>8. New staff members and teachers new to their role (e.g., admin has to do PAs for LTO on NTIP, pairing new staff with mentors, coaching, monitoring their progress, supporting them to deal with their emotions as they deal with difficult kids for the first time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td>9. Some mid-career and late career staff members (e.g., increase workload when they do not want to implement practices called for by the school improvement plan or need to be mentored in order to make such changes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>10. Limits on PD (once a month) hinders school activities and increases workload (e.g., meeting with small groups of people when they are willing, chasing staff)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIP Focus</td>
<td>11. Efforts required to develop the capacities needed to lead the school improvement initiatives; stressful preparing materials and ensuring that PLCs are facilitated properly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Work</td>
<td>12. Time spent at the board level attending meetings takes time away from the building, increases workload and interferes with teaching and administration time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP Focus</td>
<td>13. Significant effort required to build the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>14. Key feature of the teacher contract is about timetabling and ensuring everybody receives fair and equitable prep time and teaching load (even more difficult scheduling with French and English panel). This also applies to supervision schedules (e.g., duty schedules have to be aligned with safety) and it takes time earlier on to schedule. <em>But once done this helps to reduce workload</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>15. Heavy documentation involved in violence in the workplace and all forms associated with health and safety, safe schools, lock down policies (these are important but add significantly to workload and it takes time to do the training involved in understanding each new initiative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>16. Regulation 274 is the worst piece of regulation – hiring practices for occasional teachers is a serious problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP Focus</td>
<td>17. Allocating the time needed for school improvement work (e.g. planning around multiple goals) while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System/District</td>
<td>18. Too many memos and emails from district increase workload and distracts principals – untimely emails result in admins becoming reactive as opposed to being proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variable</td>
<td>Total %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>21</td>
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**Supplemental Evidence about Sources of Workload**

**Influencing Francophone School Leaders’ Workload**

Although not among the responses received from the principal and vice principal interviews, members of the project advisory committee, some representing Francophone school leaders, identified additional sources of workload bearing especially on French school administrators. These advisory board members explained that:

1. There is extra work caused by the large school sectors or boundaries - regional schools rather than neighbourhood schools. Some of these schools have no boundaries even within cities which is rarely the case for schools in other educational systems.

2. The Politique d’aménagement linguistique (French-language policy) requires that the school works to promote and maintain French in the community (not a requirement for English language schools) which places an extra burden on the responsibilities of French public principals and vice principals. French language schools are expected to transmit Francophone culture, as well. As one advisory board member noted, “In some school boards, the FFL principal has to sit on more than 50 admission committees a year, because of Article 23 of the Canadian Charter and right to access minority language schools.”

3. Even though videoconferencing helps, the great distance between most schools makes it more challenging to ensure coherence, consistency, similar procedures, etc. Central decisions are not always possible (i.e. date that the heat is turned on or off cannot be the same throughout the system). This problem is not unique to Francophone school systems, but is more common in those systems.
4. The many school calendars within each school board (required because of transportation consortia) make it very difficult to have a common principal and vice-principal day or days for system-wide work.

5. Many of the supports provided in central/regional offices are scarce in the minority system because of lack of French language infrastructures in many villages, towns and cities. Partnerships with municipalities and related agencies require many procedures to deal with such issues as safety, security, kindergarten, daycare (one school board covers over 117 municipalities).

6. Principals and vice principals have to be able to work efficiently in both English and French.

7. French language school boards typically hold regular meetings during week-ends, which is much less common in English school boards.

8. Additional time is consumed in French language schools:

- translating (verbally or in writing) for parents/guardians who are not proficient in the French language;\(^{27}\)
- guiding, supporting and reassuring parents who are not French speaking and who wish to support their children in their learning and educational experience, or are concerned about their child's learning;
- holding meetings for parents who are not French speaking (i.e. information sessions);
- recruiting supply staff where there are shortages of qualified candidates.

One of the advisory board members elaborated on this point. French principals, this member explained, not only:

> **have difficulty in securing occasional teaching staff (which can take up considerable time in this task) but ...end up covering more classes than the general English speaking principal population (excluding principals in the north) when they cannot find an occasional teacher which again takes up considerable time. On rare occasions, they engage in emergency hires which can consume considerable time and effort because**

\(^{27}\) It should be noted that many English schools serve families speaking as many as three or four dozen languages which place demands on their principals and vice principals comparable to, or greater than, those in French schools.
9. Some French schools are K-12 organizations. This means that school improvement challenges facing French school principals and vice principals span the whole public school curriculum placing extensive demands on the curricular knowledge of French school administrators and their understanding of students across many stages of their development; it also means assuming responsibility for the implementation of provincial policy across all grades.

10. Some French school administrators also have teaching responsibilities and there is a high incidence of French principals being responsible for two schools.

4.2 Moderating Variables (Appendix C, Table 17)

The framework for the study (Figure 1.1) identifies seven variables which are expected to moderate principals’ and vice-principals’ estimates of their workload; they either mute or exacerbate perceptions of workload, aside from other sources of principal and vice principal workload perceptions. These moderating variables, all of them relatively difficult to change in the short to intermediate term, include features of the student population served by the school (extent of special support needed, misbehavior, levels of achievement), the school organization (size, location, special school programs and special classrooms) and the amount of principal and vice principal experience. This section of the report describes respondents’ views of the nature and extent of impact of these moderating variables on their workload.

Size of student population. Smaller school sizes (ranging from 34 to 285 students) with small staffs that work together for overall student well-being, and a good balance of parents appropriately involved in their children’s education help to minimize workload and make it tolerable. These features make small schools rewarding places to work for some principals (17% overall, 28% CPCO, 12% OPC and 0% ADFO).

Larger school sizes (ranging from 300 to 1000 students) with increasing enrolments and very high student needs/behavioral issues stretch the amount of effort devoted to discipline and to related parent interaction. Most principals reported that the more people they had to deal with,

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28 For example, dual track English and French, single track French Immersion.
29 For example, classrooms serving students with significant developmental and behavioral issues.
the more issues needed to be resolved and the more they were pulled in different directions adding to their workload (37% overall, 49% CPCO, 31% OPC and 25% ADFO).

In a few cases, small schools (ranging from 75 to 255 students) increased principals’ workload when they were associated with very challenging circumstances e.g. significant numbers of students with special needs and behavioral issues combined with a small staff.

**Physical location of school.** Both urban and rural school locations greatly influence principal and vice principal workload. Most of the principals and vice principals who identified school location as a source of positive influence on their workload were located in urban areas ranging from relatively affluent to very affluent communities. These features of the school location facilitated principal and vice principal work (16% overall, 31% CPCO, 8% OPC and 0% ADFO). The only rural locations which made workload manageable were those including families from low to very high income levels and with some supported housing.

Interviewees who said their school location increased their workload were almost equally distributed across both rural and urban settings and served families ranging in socio-economic status (SES) from low to high (28% overall, 36% CPCO, 20% OPC and 42% ADFO). In middle class and fairly affluent communities, with more educated parents, there was much greater parental contact with principals and vice principals, while some low SES families with only basic education levels and no apparent valuing of formal education demanded a lot more principal and vice principal support to assist students. Principals and vice principals had to ensure that disadvantaged children had been adequately fed and clothed. Schools located too far (two to three hours) away from principals’ and vice principals’ homes, or schools located in two different sites, added to workload. Schools in constantly changing communities (e.g. a military base) were associated with increased and more stressful workload because of the transiency of students.

**Physical condition of the school.** New, newly renovated and old school buildings impact workload. Respondents reported that new and newly renovated schools minimized their workload (10% overall, 21% CPCO, 4% OPC and 0% ADFO). Old schools with small playgrounds increased time required for planning and duty schedules. Schools located in some older buildings with lack of space mean principals had to displace several students in order to meet with a parent. Workload is increased, as well, during renovations; during the repainting of schools; when changing locks; meeting with concerned parents; communicating with the
community at large about a change of schools that sometimes follows renovation. Asking for authorization to do the work, and the often considerable follow up and fire drill issues also add to workload. Principal and vice principal work is increased when they have to meet with contractors and prepare for lock-down policy implementation including putting in a larger screen so secretaries can see what is happening at the door where people are “buzzed in”. Issues such as these increased principal and vice principal workload according to a sizeable proportion of interviewees (20% overall, 28% CPCO, 14% OPC and 17% ADFO).

Parent approaches to school. Both parental involvement and lack of involvement influenced principal and vice principal workload. Respondents who identified parental approaches as supportive of their work were primarily speaking about fairly affluent parents (16% overall, 33% CPCO, 6% OPC and 0% ADFO). These parents were involved in school activities and helped their children with homework. Very active school councils also supported principals through fundraising, the proceeds of which paid the cost of field trips for students and helped to purchase technology for the school.

Schools in which few parents were actively involved meant more effort by school administrators related to fundraising and preparing for special school events (e.g., student dance and movie nights) (48% overall, 49% CPCO, 51% OPC and 33% ADFO). Non-involved parents had widely varying socio-economic circumstances. At one extreme, a few high income parents (predominantly in professional occupations) demanded more of principals’ time to be engaged in discussions about educational matters. At the other extreme, some low income (and sometimes illiterate) parents were difficult to communicate with and did not feel they had a role to play in their children’s formal schooling.

Community connections. The nature of a school’s community at large could have either negative or positive influences on the workload of principals and vice principals. Workload was ameliorated when the local community provided free services of the type needed by children and their families (29% overall, 54% CPCO, 18% OPC and 0% ADFO). Students in schools located in, or close to, well developed urban and suburban centers, for example, had access to a multitude of services and opportunities (e.g., the arts, hockey, piano, indoor swimming facilities). Community associations and groups used school buildings after school hours, and schools in turn received free services from the community, for example, free skating through an agreement with the city. Communities without facilities and opportunities of the sort mentioned
above, however, added to workload (11% overall, 8% CPCO, 14% OPC and 8% ADFO) and school administrators assumed more of a parental role to ensure that children were ready for learning.

About a quarter of respondents said that the average annual income of their children’s families was below $30,000. Students from many of these families, according to interviewees, were not getting proper nutrition at home, so principals and vice principals took on the job of helping to ensure these students were properly fed. Principals and vice principals in schools serving such students also worked to ensure the educational experiences of these disadvantaged children approached the experiences of more advantaged children. With donations from the community and through active school council fundraisers, principals and vice principals attempted to do this by purchasing technology and other school supplies, by providing field trips and coordinating breakfast programs. These administrators also contacted community agencies to get support to help families and students in need.

In Catholic school communities, administrators’ workload “skyrocketed”, some of our interviewees reported, when there was conflict between a priest and the school; such conflict could arise, for example, from unrealistic expectations of the priest and community wanting a reply to some problem within a short period of time (usually an hour).

**Student behavior, level of student need and student achievement.** Student need, behavior and achievement often seem to go hand in hand in the view of many interviewees. Principal and vice principal workload was considered to be quite manageable when serving relatively advantaged, well behaved (polite, respectful) students (14% overall, 28% CPCO, 6% OPC and 0% ADFO) with high levels of achievement (29% overall, 38% CPCO, 27% OPC and 8% ADFO) and low levels of needs (9% overall, 21% CPCO, 2% OPC and 0% ADFO). A manageable workload was also associated with a caring school climate in which most members of the school, not just the administrators, felt responsible for student discipline. Smaller schools were also associated with better student behavior, and so a more manageable workload.

Greater levels of support needed by students (49% overall, 41% CPCO, 57% OPC and 42% ADFO), greater incidence of student misbehavior (35% overall, 38% CPCO, 35% OPC and 25% ADFO) and lower levels of student achievement (37% overall, 33% CPCO, 39% OPC and 42% ADFO) were viewed by principals and vice principals as adding to their workload. In most cases, behavior issues increased as school enrolment increased. In schools with high levels of
student misbehavior, principals and vice principals spent most of their days dealing with such student behavior issues. Schools serving a significant proportion of students with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, autism or behavior, or students with academic and mental health challenges also consumed a great deal of principal and vice principal time.

Some interviewees’ schools had a designated class for students with behavior issues and administrators were responsible for discipline in those classrooms. Respondents also noted that students from low SES families with high needs and significant number of newcomers to Canada lacking English and/or French language proficiency increased their workload. Many of these children are bussed to school and there is a significant workload cost to supervise such bussing.

Quality of support staff. Principals’ and vice principals’ workload is much more manageable with a staff team that work well together and hold children’s best interest as their priority (25% overall, 44% CPCO, 18% OPC and 0% ADFO). Respondents described the supportive qualities of their staff as ‘committed’, ‘dedicated’, ‘hard-working’ and ‘professional’. Getting the right staff in the school, staff members who “step up” when necessary to support principals and vice principals in running the school makes workload much more manageable. A completely new staff, on the other hand, adds workload because it takes time for the staff to get to know each other and to learn how to work together as a team.

Length of principal and vice principal tenure in school. Confidence is built with experience over time. Principals and vice principals who had been in their schools for a period of three to ten years said their tenure gave them the confidence to make decisions and this minimized their workload (20% overall, 38% CPCO, 10% OPC and 0% ADFO). Principals and vice principals with relatively little experience in the position generally viewed their workload as more unmanageable (14% overall, 21% CPCO, 12% OPC and 0% ADFO). Respondents who were new to a school or new to their role, required time to learn about the community, get to know families and adjust to the way the school is run.

Vice principals with half time positions in two different schools reported added workload and felt workload became manageable only in instances where there was a very supportive principal in the school.

Vice-principal in school. A full time, experienced and competent vice principal made the principals’ workload much more manageable (18% overall, 23% CPCO, 18% OPC and 0% ADFO). Vice principals, in most cases, helped with transportation, student discipline and
employee absences. Absent a full time vice principal, principals found it difficult to set up their schedules for administration and teaching/library duties, and they ended up with much more work to do (31% overall, 28% CPCO, 39% OPC and 8% ADFO).

4.3 Questions Beyond the Framework

Interviewees were asked five questions directly related to workload, but not encompassed by the framework. These were questions about:

- strategies for coping with workload
- workload influences on responses to personal illness
- workload influences on recruiting teachers for school administration
- how to make the work more satisfying and productive
- factors to consider when implementing a new provincial or board initiative

1. Strategies for coping with workload pressures (Appendix C, Table 13)

Five strategies were identified by significant numbers of respondents including:

- Exercise (43% overall, 41% CPCO, 53% OPC and 8% ADFO)
- Know what and how to prioritize; move any paper work that does not impact students, staff and instructional leadership to the bottom of the pile (16% overall, 15% CPCO, 14% OPC and 25% ADFO)
- Take time to spend with friends and family (24% overall, 36% CPCO, 16% OPC and 17% ADFO)
- Balance life between family and work (26% overall, 41% CPCO, 16% OPC and 25% ADFO)

2. Workload Influences on Response to Personal Illness (Appendix C, Table 14)

Principals and vice principals were asked how their workload influenced their responses to their own illnesses; for example, was it decisive in determining whether they took time off to recover and why? Responses clearly indicated that workload was a very significant factor, often bringing them into their schools when they might be better off recovering at home. Interviewees spoke about, for example, the accumulations of work in their absence (37% overall, 33% CPCO, 47% OPC and 8% ADFO) and the lack of other staff (e.g., vice principal) to take charge.
Several also identified some of their strategies for avoiding illness such as adopting a healthy lifestyle, getting lots of rest, and avoiding work on weekends.

3. Workload Influence On Recruiting Teachers for School Administration (Appendix C, Table 15)

Interviewees were asked if their teachers’ perceptions of the nature and extent of principal and vice principal workload had an influence on aspirations to become a principal or vice principal. A very high proportion of respondents (70% overall, 62% CPCO, 69% OPC and 100% ADFO) reported a negative influence “absolutely”. This negative perception was formed, for example, “by observing principals’ busy schedules, long working hours, never getting lunch, struggles in dealing with parents, kids and their own issues.”

The most common reasons teachers eschewed school administration as a career path, according to interviewees, was that “some teachers believe the pay and amount of responsibility is not worth it” and ”teachers can’t afford to lose the balance they get from good pay and working conditions as a teacher in a union” (12% of respondents overall for each explanation). Seventeen percent of respondents overall did report that “a few teachers have been interested in becoming [school] administrators”.

4. How to Make the Work More Satisfying and Productive (Appendix C, Table 16)

Interviewees were asked, “If you could change some aspects of your work and the context in which you do it to make it more productive and satisfying, what changes would you make?” There was no shortage of suggestions (47 in total) although only four were mentioned by at least 20% of respondents from at least one of the three principals’ associations. These four suggestions were as follows:

- Have a full time administrator: not having a double administrator means more responsibility. There is inequality surrounding single and dual administrator schools (26% overall, 23% CPCO, 29% OPC and 25% ADFO)
- Have the necessary HR support to spread the work around more equitably – supply principals and vice principals with more secretariat and TA support. Of the four most mentioned suggestions, this one was endorsed most consistently across interviewees from all three principals’ associations (19% overall, 26% CPCO, 12% OPC and 25% ADFO).
• Allow for more autonomy; have fewer things decided centrally with respect to PA days, how needs of kids are met and how trust is built with teachers (12% overall, 23% CPCO, 6% OPC and 0% ADFO).
• Require less administration in order to allow for more instructional leadership. This was also a suggestion primarily from CPCO interviewees (14% overall, 23% CPCO, 8% OPC and 8% ADFO).

5. Factors to Consider when Implementing New Provincial or Board Initiatives (Appendix C, Table 5)

Five factors to consider when deciding on the implementation of a new initiative were identified by significant percentages of respondents.
• Number of initiatives already underway in the school (28% overall, 28% CPCO, 33% OPC and 8% ADFO)
• Degree to which existing initiatives are being implemented in the school (15% overall, 23% CPCO, 12% OPC and 0% ADFO)
• Availability of resources needed to adequately implement the new initiative (finances, manpower or professional development to support implementation) (22% overall, 10% CPCO, 33% OPC and 8% ADFO)
• Time required of P/VP to implement, manage, and ensure new initiative will be sustained (34% overall, 38% CPCO, 39% OPC and 0% ADFO)
• The school’s existing needs, priorities and goals: schools are at different places and have different needs. Among members of the three principals’ associations, ADFO interviewees were especially focused on this factor (12% overall, 5% CPCO, 10% OPC and 42% ADFO).
5. Principal and Vice-principal Survey Results

All members of the three principals’ associations were invited to respond to an online version of the survey in either French or English (Appendix B). This section describes the results of our analysis of responses as follows:

- A description of survey results (means, standard deviations)
- Relationships among variables in the framework (correlations, regressions)
- A test of a model of principal and vice-principal workload (path analysis)

Results described in this section are based on analyses reported in considerable detail in the tables included in Appendix D. Reference is made to these tables throughout this section.

5.1 Description of Survey Results

Table 5.1 reports the means and standard deviations for all variables included in the survey, as well as the internal reliabilities (Cronbach’s Alpha) for all multi-item scales. About 2550 principals and vice-principals responded to the survey (OPC = 1592, CPCO = 756, ADFO = 203); this is a 32% response rate from OPC members, 54% from CPCO members and 64% from ADFO members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rel</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement Focus</td>
<td>2425</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.853</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td>2390</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.757</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Organization</td>
<td>2351</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.667</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School System/District</td>
<td>2417</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.828</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Community</td>
<td>2356</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>2356</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>2372</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Work Outside School</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Advantage</td>
<td>2494</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.37</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Student Behavior</td>
<td>2494</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>2447</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>2521</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Configuration</td>
<td>2522</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>NA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Location</td>
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<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience in Current Role</td>
<td>2522</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in Role in Current School</td>
<td>2522</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>NA</td>
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**Mediating variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Efficacy</td>
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<td>.51</td>
<td>.880</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective Efficacy</td>
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<td>.48</td>
<td>.693</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job/Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>2407</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Dependent variables**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>=2</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Positive</td>
<td>2527</td>
<td>3.13</td>
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<td>.887</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Negative</td>
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<td>2.41</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.754</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Manageability of Workload</td>
<td>2527</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours Worked</td>
<td>2527</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Variables not in model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>m</th>
<th>=2</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special School Influence</td>
<td>1283</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province/ District Influence</td>
<td>2223</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive influence on workload</td>
<td>2183</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Response Options:**

1 1 = No impact; 2 = small impact; 3 = moderately large impact; 4 = very large impact

2 1 = Not at all; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a considerable extent; 4 = very extensive

3 1 = No influence; 2 = small influence 3 = moderately strong influence; 4 = very strong influence

4 1= disadvantaged to 5 = very advantaged

5 1= much misbehavior to 5 = no misbehavior

6 1= below provincial standards to 5 = uniformly above

7 1= fewer than 100 to 5 = more than 900

8 1= younger, lower 9 = older

9 1= mostly urban to 5 = mostly suburban

10 1= less than year to 5 = 10+

11 1 = Very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = neutral; 4 = satisfied; 5 = very satisfied

15 1= very strong influence

Appendix D, Tables 3, 5 and 7 provide comparable summaries of results for OPC, CPCO and ADFO respondents respectively.

**Independent Variables: Sources of Workload** (Appendix D, Table 2)

For scales measuring each of the 9 categories of sources of principal and vice-principal workload, the impact on workload, from most to least, is as follows:

1. SIP focus (m= 3.19): highest rated items in this scale included:

   (a) Finding time for staff to meet and work together in the context of current contractual regulations while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively (m =3.53)

   (b) Building the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals (m = 3.32)
2. Approaches to leadership (m = 3.18): highest rated items in this scale include
   
   (a) relationship-building skills (m = 3.48)
   
   (b) preferred approaches to leading and organizing (e.g., open door policy, collaborative decision
       making processes) (m = 3.34)

3. Province (m = 3.04): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) Regulation 274 and the hiring challenges which distract from a focus on school improvement (m = 3.52)
   
   (b) Other regulations demanding time to implement and reducing the time available to focus on school improvement (e.g., health and safety, lockdown policies) (m = 3.08)

4. Unions (m = 2.75): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) Prompt you to delegate the delivery of professional development to teacher leaders (m = 3.19)
   
   (b) Sometimes seem to contradict what is in the students’ best interests (m = 3.15)

5. School system/district (m = 2.58): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) volume of emails received daily (m = 3.30)
   
   (b) numbers of new programs and policies to be implemented in your school (m = 3.15)

6. External community (m = 2.34): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) demands and expectations of parents (m = 2.91)
   
   (b) mental health challenges faced by parents in the community and lack of resources to support them (m = 2.86)

7. School organization (m = 2.32): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) inadequate number of support staff and professional support services (m = 2.85)
   
   (b) lack of vice-principal or lack of sufficient vice-principal time (m = 2.58)

8. Staff (m = 2.20): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) effort required to build a collaborative working environment (m = 2.72)
   
   (b) a focus on student social welfare at the expense of student achievement (2.61)

9. Advisory work outside school (m = 2.52): the most highly rated items in this scale are as follows:
   
   (a) allow you to influence at least some province-wide decisions (recoded) (m = 3.53)
   
   (b) allow you to influence at least some board-wide decisions (recoded) (m = 2.98)

Table 5.2 identifies those specific survey items, across the 9 categories, that received a rating of 3 or more on the four point survey response scale (extent of impact on workload; 1 = not at all, 4 = very extensive). Of the 20 items listed in this table, 6 are features of principals’ and vice-principals’ own approaches to leadership (three of which contribute positively to workload
as indicated by the italics), and 6 are part of principals’ and vice-principals’ school improvement focus. Two items are attributed to the province (Regulation 274 and other regulations), three to unions (initiatives which sometimes seem contradictory to students’ best interests, affect guidelines for related decisions, and inhibit delegation), two to school systems or districts (volume of emails, numbers of new initiatives) and one to advisory work outside school (affecting influence in decision making).

According to evidence in Table 5.2, then, a high proportion of principal and vice-principal workload is attributable to the professional leadership dimensions of principal and vice-principal work inside their own schools. A small number of external sources contribute significantly to this workload, however.

### Table 5.2

**Variables Adding Most to Principal And Vice-principal Workload Across All Categories**

**Survey Results**

(rated as 3 or more on a 4-point scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIP focus</td>
<td>1. Finding time for staff to meet and work together in the context of current contractual regulations while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory work</td>
<td>2. Allow you to influence at least some province-wide decisions (recoded to negative)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>3. Regulation 274 and the hiring challenges which distract from a focus on school improvement</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Leadership</td>
<td>4. Relationship-building skills</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Leadership</td>
<td>5. Preferred approaches to leading and organizing (e.g., open door policy, collaborative decision making processes)</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP focus</td>
<td>6. Building the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System/District</td>
<td>7. Volume of emails received daily</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP focus</td>
<td>8. Complexity of the work created by the need to assist teachers to implement new approaches to instruction while ensuring them the discretion they need to do their best work</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Leadership</td>
<td>9. Knowledge of effective approaches to instruction</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Leadership</td>
<td>10. Willingness to delegate to, or share leadership with, others</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>11. Inhibiting delegation of PD for teachers (recorded as negative)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.3
Variables Moderating the Effects of Principal And Vice-principal Workload

(5-point scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderating Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade configuration</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in current role</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student advantage</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School size</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behavior</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 1 = Up to grade 3; 2 = Up to grade 5; 3 = Up to grade 6; 4 = Up to grade 8; 5 = Grades 7 and 8; 6 = Grades 6, 7 and 8; 7 = Grades 6, 7 to 9; 8 = Grades 7 to 10; 9 = Up to grade 12; 10 = Other (coded with others)

31 Five items were used to measure this variable. The responses were multiplied with ascending values from lowest (1 times most support needed to 5 times very advantaged). The resulting values for the five times were summed and then the resulting score distribution was cut into five groups. The values 1 to 5 were to the groups with 1 being 'a great deal of additional support needed' and 5 'very advantaged'.

---

**Moderating Variables**

The status of 7 variables in potentially moderating principal and vice-principal workload were measured by the survey. Table 5.3 reports the number of responses to these items, along with the means and standard deviation of responses to each, ordered from highest to lowest rating.
The ratings in Table 5.3 mean that principal and vice-principal respondents had about 6 years of experience in their current role and had been in their current school slightly more than 3 years. Their schools, on average:

- had grade configurations between “up to grade 6” and “up to grade 8”
- served moderately advantaged students achieving at or above the provincial standard of achievement in some areas
- were between 400 and 900 students in size
- experienced some student misbehavior
- were located in rural or mixed urban/suburban communities (although the large standard deviation for this item makes the “average location” a bit meaningless)

**Mediating Variables**

Job satisfaction and both individual and collective efficacy, measured using multi-item scales, served as the mediating variables for the survey. As Table 5.4 indicates, principals’ and vice-principals’ ratings of individual items within each of the scales measuring efficacy and job satisfaction did not vary much. Principals and vice-principals reported feeling moderately efficacious individually (m = 2.64) and collectively (m = 2.48) and had moderate levels of job satisfaction (m = 3.29 on a 5 point scale), as well.

With respect to job satisfaction, in particular, the two items receiving the lowest ratings would seem to be highly dependent on working conditions:

- The chance your job gives you to do what you are best at (m = 3.28) suggests less autonomy exists than principals and vice-principals believe is productive for their school improvement efforts;
- Your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job (m = 3.19)
### Table 5.4
Variables Mediating the Effects of Principal and Vice-principal Workload

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Efficacy Aggregate ($I = \text{not at all}; 4 = \text{very extensive}$)</th>
<th>2.64</th>
<th>.51</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivate your teachers?</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate enthusiasm among your staff for a shared vision of the school?</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage change in your school?</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a positive learning environment in your school?</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate student learning in your school?</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise student achievement on standardized tests?</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Efficacy Aggregate ($I = \text{not at all}; 4 = \text{very extensive}$)</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff in your school have the knowledge and skill they need to improve student learning?</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your school, continuous improvement is viewed by most staff as a necessary part of every job?</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your school, problems are viewed as issues to be solved, not as barriers to action?</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central district staff communicate a belief in the capacity of teachers to teach even the most difficult students?</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction Aggregate ($I = \text{very dissatisfied}, 5 = \text{very satisfied}$)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The progress you are making toward the goals you set out for yourself in your present position?</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chance your job gives you to do what you are best at?</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which conditions enable you to be effective?</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The opportunity you have to contribute to important decisions?</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your opportunity for professional growth and development?</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job?</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your present job in light of your career expectations?</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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</table>

**Dependent variables**

As Table 5.5 indicates, the survey measured both “cognitive” (manageability, time) and “emotional” (positive, negative) dimensions of workload from principals’ and vice-principals’ perspectives. Of the two cognitive measures, one asked for an overall opinion (5-point scale) about extent of workload, ranging from light (1) to frequently unmanageable (5). The mean response of 3.68 falls between “excessive but manageable” and “sometimes unmanageable”.

The second cognitive measure of workload asked principal and vice-principals to estimate the hours per week worked both inside and outside the schools. The mean response of
3.90 identified in Table 5.5 indicates that principals and vice-principals report working in excess of about 50 - and likely closer to 55 - hours per week.

Two separate measures were used to determine principals’ and vice-principals’ emotional responses to their workload. One of these measures asked principals and vice-principals (on a 4-point scale) to indicate how accurately four positive emotions represented their feelings about their work (1 = very inaccurate, 4 = very accurate). The mean response of 3.13 to the four positive emotions as a whole falls between “somewhat inaccurate” to “somewhat accurate”. Of the four positive emotions included in the survey, highest ratings were given to “meaningful” (3.36) followed, in order, by “satisfying” (3.12), rewarding (3.10) and enjoyable” (2.94). The job is worth doing but it is not much “fun”, these results suggest.

The second measure of principals’ and vice-principals’ emotional response to their workload asked how accurately four negative emotions represented their feelings about their work. The mean response of 2.41 to the four negative emotions as a whole falls between “somewhat inaccurate” to “somewhat accurate”. Of the four negative emotions included in the survey, highest ratings were given to “stressful” (3.27) followed, in order, by “frustrating (2.81), annoying (1.84) and resentment” (1.73).

Table 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables: Measures of Workload</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1 = very inaccurate; 4 = very accurate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived manageability of workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotions in response to workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• satisfying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• rewarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions in response to workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• annoying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• stressful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• frustrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• resentment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses to Questions Outside the Framework

The survey included six questions not encompassed by the framework for the study but clearly important in a study of principal and vice-principal workload.

- strategies for coping with workload
- workload influences on responses to personal illness
- workload influences on recruiting teachers for school administration
- how to make the work more satisfying and productive
- factors to consider when implementing a new provincial or board initiative
- challenges associated with leading special schools

1. Strategies for coping with workload. One of the five questions asked how extensively principals and vice-principals used four types or categories of strategies for managing their workload pressures. Receiving the highest rating (m = 2.79) by a small margin, family-related strategies were followed in order by organizational strategies (m = 2.72), peer related strategies (2.42) and health related strategies (2.40).

Table 5.6
Strategies For Managing Workload Pressures

(1 = not at all; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a considerable extent; 4 = very extensive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregate response to strategies</th>
<th>2.58</th>
<th>.63</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family-related strategies (e.g., spend one-on-one time with own children, other family members and friends; attend church regularly)</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational strategies (e.g., establish and stick to priorities; avoid taking work home; anticipate tasks at least a month in advance; develop efficient ways of responding to urgent but predictable issues; turn off Blackberry at night)</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer related strategies (e.g., network with other P/VPs; have a mentor)</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-related strategies (e.g., meditation, exercise, massage therapy, yoga, deep breathing, limit alcohol consumption, healthy eating)</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Workload influences on responses to personal illness.** The survey asked respondents about the extent to which their workload prevented them from taking time off to recover from illness. The four response options for this question ranged from “rarely preventing time off” (1) to “almost always preventing time off” for illness (4). The response to this item (m = 3.14, SD = .91) suggests that principals and vice-principals consider workload to be a significant barrier to taking time off to recover from illness.

3. **Workload influences on recruiting teachers for school administration.** Survey respondents were asked about the extent to which their teachers’ perceptions of the nature and extent of principal and vice-principal workload had an influence on their aspirations to become a principal or vice-principal. The mean response of 2.96 (SD = .85) indicates that such workload was an influence “to a considerable extent”.

4. **How to make the work more satisfying and productive.** A fourth question asked respondents to rate 15 suggestions for keeping principal and vice-principal workload more manageable (“To what extent would the following changes have a positive influence on your workload?”). As Table 5.7 reports, 10 of the suggestions received a rating of 3 or more on the 4-point response scale indicating that their positive influence would be considerable.

   Two of the three highest rated suggestions concerned modifications to Regulation 274 (m = 3.55) and some features of collective agreements (m = 3.38); this finding is consistent with most other data collected for the study from those in all roles providing such data.

   Five of the remaining suggestions listed in Table 5.7 entail increases of some sort (mental health resources (m = 3.39), vice-principals (m = 3.36), autonomy (m = 3.02), support staff (m = 3.29), and policies and procedures for responding to aggressive parents (m = 2.96). Four suggestions entail reductions of some sort (number of vice-principals with teaching responsibilities (m = 3.00), time and effort required for teacher appraisal (m = 2.93), non-teaching staff appraisal (m = 2.70), and public attention to EQAO results (m = 2.90).

   Principals and vice-principals rated quite highly “a stop to the habit of telling us to do more with less” (m = 3.28). Much less highly rated were a “temporary halt on new provincial or district initiatives for schools to implement” (2.92) and “quicker responses of central office staff to requests from schools” (m = 2.60).
Table 5.7

Suggestions For Keeping Principal and Vice-principal Workload More Manageable

(1 = not at all; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a considerable extent; 4 = very extensive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive influence on workload</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggregate of all influences</strong></td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications to Regulation 274 so that principals have considerably more autonomy to hire teaching staff for their schools</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased resources (staff and other) for dealing with mental health challenges</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to some features of collective agreements on the running of the school and school improvement efforts</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in the number of vice-principals</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stop to the habit of telling us we need to do more with less</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased staff resources in schools for managing non-instructional matters</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A significant reduction in the number of new initiatives in the future from the province</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased P/VPs autonomy in the running of their schools</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in the number of vice-principals with teaching responsibilities</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures for responding to unreasonable and aggressive parents</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in the time and effort required for teacher performance appraisals</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary halt on new provincial or district initiatives for schools to implement</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced public attention to EQAO scores and greater opportunity for schools to tell their own story</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in the time and effort required for the performance appraisals of non-teaching staff</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quicker responses of central office staff to requests from schools</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Factors to consider when implementing a new provincial or board initiative. A fifth survey question asked about factors that enter into principal and vice-principal decisions about implementing new initiatives proposed by the province or by their own school system. Respondents rated 11 possible factors; these are listed in Table 5.8 from the most to the least influential.
Table 5.8
Factors Influencing Decisions about Implementing Provincial or System Initiatives

(1 = no influence; 2 = small influence; 3 = moderately strong influence; 4 = very strong influence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Influencing Decisions</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate influence of all factors</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time required of P/VP to implement, manage, and ensure new initiative will be sustained</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time required to fully engage those staff whose work will be influenced by the new initiative</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of initiatives already underway in the school</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of resources needed to adequately implement the new initiative</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree to which existing initiatives are being implemented in the school</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of paperwork associated with managing the new initiative</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of staff understanding of new initiative</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification, rationale and/or motivation giving rise to the new initiative</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of eliminating some existing tasks to create time for tasks associated with the new initiative</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of trust among staff and between staff and P/VP</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Challenges associated with leading special schools. Respondents leading special schools, schools offering French-language programs in particular, were asked to rate the extent (4-point scale) to which 7 challenges associated with leading such schools placed demands on their workload. Only principals and vice-principals of special schools responded to this item, hence the number of respondents was many fewer than responses to other parts of the survey.

Table 5.9 lists the 7 challenges from those rated as most to least demanding. By a wide margin “Difficulty finding replacements for French teachers when they are off because there is a shortage in the district” (m = 2.55) was rated highest. None of these challenges, the ratings indicate, were extensive workload creators although the relatively large standard deviations suggest wide differences among respondents.
Table 5.9
Workload Demands of a Special School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demands of a Special School e.g. Dual Track French and English, Single Track French Immersion (1 = not at all; 4 = very extensive)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate influence</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty finding replacement for French teachers when they are off because there is a shortage in the district</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable scheduling with French and English panel</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding resources for French second language students</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing French candidates</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning professional development for teachers in both French and English panels</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing EQAO math results for French and English</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District requests for additional tasks related to French language (e.g. hiring French teachers, teaching French course) that take you away from your school building</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Principal Association Members’ Survey Results

Table 9 in Appendix D provides a detailed comparison of responses organized by the principal association of respondents. This table also describes the results of an Analysis of Variance to determine the statistical significance of each of these differences at the level of the individual survey item and the multi-item scales (far right column of Table 9).

There are many differences reaching statistical significance among association member responses, but no overall pattern distinguishing the responses of members of one association from another. Limiting attention to the Independent Variables (sources of workload), for example:

School improvement focus: responses to 3 of 7 items measuring this variable are significantly different with OPC members rating all 3 items highest.

School staff: responses to 7 of 11 items measuring this variable are significantly different, but there is no pattern of members of one association accounting for these differences.

School organization: responses to 2 of 6 items measuring this variable are significantly different with OPC members assigning highest ratings to these 2 items.

School system or district: responses to 6 of 12 items measuring this variable are significantly different. CPCO members rated 4 of the 6 items highest.
**External community:** responses to 7 of 8 items measuring this variable are significantly different. CPCO members rated 4 of the 7 items highest.

**Province:** responses to 3 of 4 items measuring this variable are significantly different. CPCO members rated 1 of the 3 items highest; OPC rated 2 items highest.

**Unions:** responses to 9 of 10 items measuring this variable are significantly different. CPCO members rated 8 of the 9 items highest.

**Advisory work outside school:** responses to 5 of 7 items measuring this variable are significantly different. OPC members rated 4 of the 5 items highest.

**Approaches to leadership:** responses to all 8 items measuring this variable are significantly different. OPC members rated 6 of the 8 items highest.

For additional information about the specific items rated differently by association members see Appendix D, Table 9.

**Comparison of Principal and Vice-principal Survey Responses**

Table 10 in Appendix D provides a detailed comparison of survey responses by principals and vice-principals. This table also describes the results of an Analysis of Variance to determine the statistical significance of each of these differences at the level of the individual survey item and the multi-item scales (items and scales where differences in the responses of principals reached statistical significance appear in bold type).

Unlike the comparison of results among members of the three principals’ associations, where no clear pattern of differences emerged, a very clear and unambiguous pattern is evident in the comparison of principal and vice-principal responses. Differences in principal and vice-principal ratings were significant for 26 of the 73 items measuring sources of principal and vice-principal workload; vice-principals’ ratings were highest for 23 of these items. Two of three items rated highest by principals were items about the external community (for which principals might well be expected to assume a major responsibility):

- *An expectation by your board or community that you be involved as a member of local community groups*
- *Reaching out to community agencies to seek support for children and their families*

The third item, measuring union sources of workload, was:
[Union regulations] *Result in P/VPs doing significant student supervision before and after school hours.*

This overall pattern of higher ratings of workload sources by vice-principals might be explained by the relatively greater experience of principals and both the broader perspective and greater expertise often accompanying such experience.

### 5.2 Relationships among Variables

The second section of Appendix D includes four tables (Tables 12 through 15) that report correlations\(^{32}\) between each of the four sets of variables (independent, moderating, mediating and dependent) included in the framework (the table numbers referred to in this section are those used in the Appendix). This section briefly summarizes relationships in these tables large enough to have some practical significance. Many of the relationships in the four tables are statistically significant, but not all are large enough to be of much practical significance. A correlation of .20 or more is used in this section as the minimum level to have such practical significance\(^{33}\).

For purposes of examining relationships among variables, as well as for testing the model framing this study (next section 5.3), each of the items used to measure the nine independent variables in the survey were re-conceptualized as representing one of the three underlying variables (explained in Section 2: The Framework for the Study). These three underlying independent variables are Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Social Support. The distribution of survey items used as measures of each of these three variables can be found in Table 11 of Appendix D, along with the reliability of each of the three scales; these scales exceed minimum requirements (about .60) for acceptable levels of reliability (.80 for role ambiguity, .86 for role conflict and .75 for social support).

*Moderating and dependent variables.* While there are many statistically significant correlations reported among variables in Table 12, most of them are quite small. Using .20 as the minimum standard for considering a correlation to have much practical significance, only one relationship achieves this standard. This relationship, a negative one, is between student

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32 These were Pearson Product correlations

33 Researchers commonly invoke Cohen’s (1992) suggestion about interpreting the significance of correlations and effect sizes. He suggests that .10 be considered “weak”, .30 be considered “medium” and .50 or more be considered “strong”. The type of correlation reported here (Pearson Product Correlation) can also be considered an “effect size”.

50
misbehavior and the extent to which principals and vice-principals consider their job to be manageable ($r = -0.21$). The more student misbehavior is evident in the school, the less manageable principals and vice-principals consider their workload to be.

**Mediating and dependent variables.** Seven relationships between mediating and dependent variables meet or exceed .20 as Table 13 indicates. The largest of these correlations is between job satisfaction and both sets of emotional responses of principals and vice-principals to their workload ($r = 0.58$ and $-0.51$), as well as how manageable they consider their workload to be ($r = -0.42$). When job satisfaction is high, emotional responses to workload are generally positive, but there remains a negative relationship between job satisfaction and the perceived manageability of the workload ($r = -0.42$).

Both individual and collective efficacy also have positive relationships with emotional responses to workload that meet or exceed the .20 level.

**Independent and mediating variables.** Table 14 reports 6 relationships between these three variables (role conflict, role ambiguity, social support) and the three mediating variables that exceed .20. Role ambiguity is related to all three mediators with correlations of $-0.25$ (individual efficacy), $-0.35$ (collective efficacy) and $-0.40$ (job satisfaction). Role conflict is related to both collective efficacy ($r = -0.21$) and job satisfaction ($r = -0.35$), while lack of social support is related to job satisfaction ($r = -0.41$).

**Independent and dependent variables.** Eleven of 12 possible correlations between the three independent variables and the four dependent variables exceed .20 (see Table 15). All three independent variables are related to both positive ($r = -0.21$ to $-0.25$) and negative emotions ($r = 0.31$ to $0.41$) at about the same strength and in the expected direction. Correlations between all three independent variables and both the manageability of workload and the amount of time ($r = 0.22$ to $0.43$) required do not behave as expected; however, these relationships are positive, suggesting for example, that greater role ambiguity is associated with perceptions of workload as being more manageable. We have no explanation for this set of relationships.

### 5.3 Test of the Model Explaining Principal and Vice-principal Workload

The third section of Appendix D reports detailed results of path analysis (Structural Equations Modeling, specifically LISREL) conducted to test the model used as the framework for the study (Figure 1.1: Framework Explaining Variation In Principal And Vice-principal Workload).
Perceived Workload). This section provides a non-technical account of what can be concluded from the path analysis using Figure 5.1 as a reference point. Figure 5.1 is a revision of Figure 1.1 based on results of the analysis: it differs from the initial framework by its omission of all moderating variables. As reported above, there was only one correlation between moderating and independent variables that achieved a correlation of .20 stipulated as a minimum for serious consideration. Indeed, only 5 of the 32 exceeded .10. So the path analysis included only three sets of variables (Independent, Mediating and Dependent).

The path coefficients reported in Table 16 of Appendix D go beyond simple correlations reported earlier by showing the strength of the relationship between the linked variables while also taking into account the other variables in the model. For example, the correlation coefficient for individual efficacy and positive emotions is .28, whereas the path coefficient is less (.10) because the model takes into account the effects of other factors such as the effect of role ambiguity, role conflict, social support and collective efficacy on the relationship between individuals’ perception of their efficacy and the extent of their positive emotions about their workload.

![Figure 5.1: A revised Framework for Explaining Variation in Principal and Vice-principal Perceived Workload](image)

As Table 16 in the Appendix D reports, the path coefficients between workload sources (RC, RA and SS) and measures of workload are strongest in the case of Role Conflict; it has significant relationships with perceptions of how manageable is the workload (.27), how much time is consumed by work (.19) and negative emotions about the work (.11). Role Ambiguity has significant but very weak direct relationships (.11) with negative emotions about the work as does lack of Social Support (.07).

Relationships are somewhat stronger between workload sources and the mediating variables, as the model framing the study anticipates. Role Ambiguity has moderately strong
relationships with Collective Efficacy (-.46), and weaker but significant relationships with Individual Efficacy (-.17) and Job Satisfaction (-.16). Role Conflict, however, has significant but only weak relationships with all three mediators, ranging from .10 to .19. Lack of Social Support has its strongest relationship with Job Satisfaction (-.28), a weaker relationship with Collective Efficacy (-.10) and only a weak relationship with Individual Efficacy (-.04).

The primary avenue through which sources of workload (Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity and Social Support) influence emotions and perceptions about the extent of workload is through Job Satisfaction. Neither Individual nor Collective Efficacy is significantly related to three of the workload measures and have only a weak relationship with Time Consumed by Work (09 and -.07). Job Satisfaction has moderate relationships with all but Time Consumed by Work (-.09), ranging from .45 (positive emotions), to -.31 (negative emotions) and -.30 (Manageability of Workload).

Results of the path analysis described in Table 5.10 (also see Table 17 in Appendix D) indicate how much of the variation in workload is explained by the model as a whole. Considering each of the four measures of workload first, this table indicates that the model as a whole explains:

- 38% of the variation in Positive Emotions; Job Satisfaction (.53) and Individual Efficacy (.25) contribute most to this explained variation (see section 3 of the table).
- 36% of the variation in Negative Emotions; Job Satisfaction (-.37) and Role Ambiguity (.21) are the largest factors in explaining such variation.
- 33% of the variation in principals’ and vice-principals’ perceptions of how Manageable is their workload; Job Satisfaction (-.32) and Role Conflict (.34) contribute most to this explained variation.
- 7% of the variation in principals’ and vice-principals’ estimates of their total Time working is explained primarily by Role Conflict (.20).

With respect to the Mediating variables, evidence reported in Table 17 indicates that the model, as a whole, explains:

- 31% of the variation in Individual Efficacy
- 14% of the variation in Collective Efficacy and
- 31% of the variation in Job Satisfaction.
Table 5.10
Amount of Variance Explained by the Model

1. **Dependent Variable** (total variation explained by the independent and mediating variables, as well as the relationships among the dependent and mediating variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Positive</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Negative</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Mediating Variables**: (total variation explained by the independent variables on the mediating variables, as well the relationships among the mediating variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Efficacy</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Efficacy</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Individual Contribution of Dependent and Mediating Variables to Explained Variation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Manage</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ti Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   |                      |           |           |        |      |
   |                      | Individual Efficacy | -.13* | -.06* | .07* |
   |                      | Collective Efficacy  | -.04*  | .01   | -.03 |
   |                      | Job Satisfaction    | .53*   | -.37* | -.32* | -.09* |

**Fit Indices for the Model:**
- RMSEA: .05
- RMR: .02
- AGFI: .97
- NFI: .99

\[ \chi^2 = 60.82, \text{ df} = 9, (p=.00) \]

(all but the \( \chi^2 \) index meet fit standards)
6. Trustee Focus Group Results

One focus group interview was conducted with a selected sample of 10 trustees from across the province nominated by the Ontario School Boards Associations. This interview was conducted on December 17 from 1:00 to 3:00 PM with trustees from public, Catholic, English-language and French-language boards of education in most parts of the province. Two members of the research team were in attendance and both audio and written records were kept of the interview. Nine questions providing the framework for the interview were sent to participants in advance. During the interview, three additional questions were raised and answered. What follows is a précis of responses to the total of 10 questions with some direct quotes from participants; as well, the quotes were selected to help elaborate on responses and were chosen because they represented the typical response fairly accurately.

1. From trustee’s perspectives, what are the main sources of principal/vice-principal (P/VP) workload?

Trustees identified 20 sources of P/VP workload. Several of these sources are very broad (e.g., managing the internal operations of the school) while others are examples of what is entailed in the broader categories. However, the 20 are outlined below without any further effort at classification.

- **Excessive numbers of initiatives to be implemented:** These are initiatives from the board and the ministry. As one trustee said, P/VPs “have a lot on their plates and the more we put on there, the more pieces are falling off – a lot is falling off the plate and nothing is being done [to alleviate the problem].” Tight deadlines related to many of these initiatives also add to workload.

- **Inadequate training provisions for implementing some external initiatives:** An example of this source of workload cited by one trustee concerned the lack of training for those implementing the province’s Early Childhood Education (ECE) initiative with two staff members in each classroom. As this trustee explained, during the first year of implementation there was no training for staff at the beginning. Yet challenges arose, for example, from parents meeting and talking to someone in the morning and someone else late in the day
We told the deputy minister, before you get into something like that maybe you should first think of training people for this new context. But they didn’t. So what do you think is going to happen next? People will say I do this and that but I don’t get paid for that so I want to get paid for that. But I was never trained for that position.

This same trustee went on to note:

We have the same situation with principals when we decided we are taking them out of the union and they can suspend kids out of high school. We didn’t think it out, we just imposed it. So now we are doing it backwards and next we are going to do it with these ECE people.

- **The documentation required of principals in relation to ministry and board policies:** Almost all board and ministry initiatives managed by school administrators require them to report on results, a significant source of workload. For example, the Safe Schools Act requires principals to investigate and make records of all investigations\(^34\).
- **High expectations for the performance of schools:** Such expectations are held by most school systems but in the context of limited resources and the need to support students who, for example, have significant mental health challenges that schools are not well-equipped to address.
- **First-year implementation of full day kindergarten:** Managing such implementation consumes a great deal of time. Trustees noted that there are many big classes filled with young children. As well, some schools do not have adequate facilities and many principals do not have the background or training needed to advise on how additions should be built in their schools. Nevertheless, that is what is expected of them.
- **Before and after school program supervision:** If a child is not picked up on time, for example, the principal has to stay in school until the pickup takes place.
- **Managing the internal operations of a school:** This is the normal, everyday business of school administrators including, for example, building staff relationships and other human resource tasks associated with as many as 100 employees in a large school, formally evaluating teachers every five years, regularly observing teachers’ classroom

\(^{34}\) One trustee explained that when it comes to expulsion, trustees have to review the case for expulsion before approving it.
work, working with individual students, dealing with student discipline and the like. Some other sources of workload listed below might also be subsumed as part of “managing the internal operations of the school”.

- **The unpredictable nature of the principal’s day**: Lack of certainty about what the day holds for P/VPs (their own plans aside) adds to their workload. Unanticipated tasks add work volume, require task rescheduling, and lengthen the time otherwise required for task completion because of the need to “warm up” again to complete an interrupted task. As one trustee said, “They are busy people from [ensuring an adequate supply of] toilet paper to answering a crisis, to a lockdown”.

- **The “people-intensive” nature of P/VPs’ work**: Sources of potential interruptions in principals’ or vice-principals’ days are legion partly because of the number of different people for whom they are responsible and to whom they are accountable. P/VPs are expected to be available much of the time to others (e.g., teachers, consultants, coordinators, facility staff, IT staff, HR staff, Health and Safety staff) because these staff members need (or think they need) the principal’s help to implement what they are doing.

- **Arranging for substitute teachers**: While many boards have automated systems for contacting substitutes in a teacher’s absence, not all do; in these cases either principals or vice-principals are typically required to make last minute calls to find substitute teachers.

- **Meeting and building relationships with parents**: According to several trustees, parents are among the more significant reasons for the unpredictable nature of school administrators’ days. Parents drop in to the school or phone the principal unexpectedly and often want immediate access to the principal.

- **Mentoring new colleagues**: This is a normal expectation of principals in many boards, although ADFO provides a voluntary peer mentoring program for its members.

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35 One trustee noted that his/her board had established a policy requiring parents to make an appointment when they wanted to talk to the principal. Another board was reported to have a parent complaint policy. If a trustee gets a parent call, it has to be sent back to the teacher or principal. Assuming this has been done, then they are instructed to contact the superintendent, and then the director and “the buck stops at the trustee.”
• **Involvement in board policy formation**: Many principals are members of curriculum teams in their own schools and participate in board-level teams, as well. In Catholic boards, principals are involved in faith formation. Provincial principals’ associations do this work also, calling on their members to assist.

• **Meetings outside of the school building**: Being away from the school building typically means that school administrators’ workload increases because much of what they would be doing in their buildings, while away, remains to be addressed when they return.

• **School openings and closings**: These organizational transitions exact significant administrative costs and, because of the community attention they inevitably attract, significant political costs as well.

• **Scheduling and managing the bussing of students.**

• **Justifying or explaining board policies in the local school community**: One trustee explained this source of workload as follows: “Trustees do their best to take ownership of their policies but let’s be honest, it’s the person that the parent sees first thing in the morning that they are going to be angry at about the bus or a field trip or something that happened to their job. And so, as much as we would say that bussing policies are our responsibility, it doesn’t quite work that way – it’s a chain effort. So they are looking after all of that”.

• **Interpreting ambiguous language in collective agreements**: One trustee explained this source of P/VP workload as follows: “They are almost walking on egg shells in trying to manage the human resource component of the schools, and they don’t feel confident enough to make those decisions, so it delays them and takes twice the time, with a call to the superintendent of HR who will then likely make a call to the province… just because everybody is in such a brand new, difficult, spot with respect to human resources and human capital”.

• **Lack of experience**: A significant proportion of the province’s P/VPs are relatively new to their roles. These administrators face a steep learning curve, one that makes

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36 One trustee noted that in his/her board P/VPs are asked to contact the board for any out of the ordinary requests. They cannot make an interpretation call on any collective agreement without living the consequences of their actions.
each new task much more time consuming than it is for their more experienced peers.

- Resolving competing priorities: Several trustees pointed to “mixed messages” from the Ministry about its priorities and initiatives that had to be interpreted by principals (if not by board staff). The diversity found within many schools local communities is also a source of competing priorities. Several trustees said that “everything is changing and shifting”.

2. Are trustees able to estimate the P/VP workload implications of decisions made at the board table? If so, how is that done?

Most of the trustees included in the focus group believed that they were able to estimate the workload of their principals and vice-principals reasonably well. None said they were not able to do this. However, responses suggest considerable variation across boards in the nature and amount of interaction between trustees and principals that would inform trustees about the impact of their actions on the workload of principals and vice-principals. This variation ranged from indirect contact, through direct informal contact, to formal procedures for ensuring direct contact with P/VPs.

The “indirect contact” alternative was identified by several trustees. As these trustees explained, information to and from principals and trustees was routed through superintendents or the director. When this was the case, noted one trustee, “the Director has to play a role in letting the P/VPs know what is happening in the board in order to avoid this problem [lack of trustee knowledge of P/VP workload]. This is not happening everywhere”. So “indirect contact” does not mean no information for trustees about P/VP workload implications of trustee initiatives. Rather, it means receiving that information through senior staff.

Several trustees also associated their boards with the “direct informal contact” alternative. This alternative included, for example:

- phone conversations with principals about important issues;
- contact initiated by principals advising trustees of the consequences of policies being discussed at the board table (“have you thought how that is going to impact our members”). The one trustee identifying this method described it as “a good two way
relationship” in his/her system. Another trustee explained how the “direct informal contact” alternative worked in his system as follows:

*If you ask the right questions of your principals in the schools that you represent, and you have developed trust and some confidentiality then you will get your answers. Sometimes it’s not a good thing to get too close, but at the same time it is very difficult to understand what is going on in the system because of the buffering.*

Trustees identified several methods for ensuring, the third alternative, direct contact between trustees and P/VPs, including:

- periodically scheduled meetings or other interactions between trustees and their boards’ P/VP associations.
- membership by P/VPs in administrative council or other forums with senior leaders and/or chair of the board. Explained one trustee about his/her own board’s procedure:

  *A lot of principals sit with all SOs and the director of education at least three to four times a year on the general orientation that the board is going to take and they can influence the decision at that point. But it’s only a number of principals that belong to this committee; it gets the message to the executive committee level and does not get back to the trustees and you don’t want the trustee to be in there.*

- rotation of board meetings in school communities throughout the system (a method identified by a trustee in a northern board with few schools serving a very large geographical region); the principal of the school in which the board meeting is held attends the board meeting to report on the school’s activities.
- trustee participation in decisions about the hiring of principals and vice-principals.
- reporting requirements embedded in the board’s strategic planning process.

Extending responses to question 2, trustees believed that to do their work effectively, they needed from their P/VPs information about, for example:

- how policies established by trustees are working “on the ground”, that is, what are the challenges associated with implementing those policies and what impact are they having in schools, particularly with respect to student achievement;
• the number of initiatives being implemented at the same time in schools (one board, it was reported, had 40 initiatives underway at the same time);
• “honest conversations” about student achievement.

3. Are there things that trustees sometimes do that exacerbate P/VP workload?

Trustees were neither surprised by this question nor hesitant to identify things they and their colleagues on the board did that added to P/VP workload. Seven trustee-generated sources of workload were identified.

• Intrusions into parent-school interactions: According to several trustees, getting too close to issues between schools and parents sometimes makes it more difficult for principals to work out satisfactory solutions.

• Time consuming requests for non-critical information: Some trustees, it was reported, ask for reports, typically through superintendents to principals, that are of dubious value but take up considerable P/VP time to provide.40

• Making exceptions to policies in order to satisfy local interests: Several trustees pointed to instances in which a board of trustees agreed on a policy (for example, bussing) and then an individual board member responded to some pressure within their local communities to circumvent or make exceptions to the policy; trustees believed that to be a source of stress for principals. Said one trustee, “it is absolutely wrong but it happens because our role is political and we can never forget that. There is pressure from both ends”.

• Some types of structural re-organization: These are re-organizations that add workload by reducing the amount of support (from superintendents, for example) for P/VPs. By way of example, one trustee explained that reorganization in his/her board significantly reduced the number but increased the size of each “family of schools”. As a consequence, “there is less time with the SO. So most things are downloaded to the principal and vice-principal in the school”.

• Procurement policies and procedures: In a few systems, trustees believed these policies and procedures sometimes added to P/VP workload. For example, one trustee

40 The solution to this problem in one board is if a trustee needs information, they bring it to the board and the board decides if it’s worth staff time
argued that in his/her system “the principal could run up to the Staples[store] and grab that bag of pencils that he needs today instead of going through the 3-day ordering process and waiting for it to be delivered”. But by no means did all trustees hold such views about their own boards’ policies and procedures

- **Single administrator schools**: Although very small schools have fewer people to manage, they are still responsible for completing the same array of administrative tasks as do larger schools, but with only one administrator to perform those tasks. Not all trustees agreed that single administrator schools created more workload for the principal; however, said one trustee, “In these cases the student and staff population is very low. They have the time to do their tasks. Often principals look for small schools because of the lesser workload”.

- **Administrator transfer policies**: Frequently moving P/VPs from school to school places demands on those moved, for example, to build trusting working relationships with a new staff, identify the new schools strengths and weaknesses, become familiar with the organizational culture of the new school, develop productive relationships with parents and other members of the community, review or re-develop priorities for school improvement and much more.\(^{41}\)

Nonetheless, one trustee reported that his/her board moves P/VPs every 5 years. The rational for such a policy, this trustee explained, is as follows:

> We have board objectives in certain schools where some principals are better with arts and some are better with sports, so we try and move them around so that everything is done in every school. That’s something that doesn’t go down all that well. We’ve been doing that for the past 15 years at least. We want their positive values to reflect the new assignments.

4. **What are trustees able to do to keep P/VP workload manageable?**

Trustees had quite a bit to say in response to this question, pointing to both longer-term and relatively fundamental approaches they took to P/VP workload, as well as more immediate and

\(^{41}\) To keep these additions to P/VP workload manageable, transfer policies should likely err on the side of stability. While evidence about this claim is not extensive, it is quite consistent. For example, see Mascall, B., Leithwood, K. (2010). Investing in leadership: the district’s role in managing principal turnover, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9, 4, 367-383.
relatively short-term approaches. Long-term efforts identified by trustees to keep P/VP workload manageable were as follows:

- **Limiting P/VP work to things that matter most for students:** Assess the contribution board policies make to student achievement and take off things that don’t make a difference. Trustees emphasized that all initiatives from the ministry should be aligned with board objectives. As one trustee explained:

  *Our school board has a five-year program where we have some direct objectives. We always ask the question “Is this going to be within the reach of these objectives?” If not, we are not going to do it. We tell our principals, take it off the plate – We get money for doing stuff in our school and there are so many of them. We counted over 40 in our case. The money is coming from the ministry and we have to report on this. Sometimes it’s just a grant of $10,000 but the reporting is worth $20,000 or $30,000 and it’s not worth going through this and ministry is saying no do this it’s going to make the students better or achieve better – If it’s not within our board’s 5-year plan, it gets taken off the plate and we’re not going to do it.*

One trustee explained, as well, that:

*It’s not all board trustees that control the P/VP workload. It’s often the Administrative Team that does that job. We try our best to make sure that all things not geared to student success don’t fall on the P and VP plate. Mind you, the Ministry [and senior administration] is a culprit when it comes to their [P/VP] workload.*

- **Allow P/VPs the autonomy they need to do the job:** Trustees advocated for P/VP autonomy and respect. As one said:

  *It has to be clearly articulated that this group of people are …the ones that wear student success day in day out – give them the credit and the confidence to manage their instructional community.*

- **Manage the board through its strategic and operational plans:** One board sets a strategic plan with three main goals and [these goals] become the schools’ main goals. “Everything is streamlined and focused on those goals”.

- **Hire people with the skills that schools need:** In one system, a trustee is assigned to the hiring committee as an observer to ensure that the principal selected is someone who will be representing trustees properly when they meet with parents.

- **Provide training to P/VPs in areas they may not have had opportunities to develop:** Some of those areas for training mentioned as examples included P/VPs’ “new” role as instructional leaders, complex problem solving skills, effective human resource
management (e.g., how to handle difficult people). Several trustees believed that such training, especially when it leads to certification, gives P/VPs confidence in dealing with those difficult issues.

Six shorter-term approaches to keeping P/VP workload manageable, mostly unique to individual boards, were described by trustees:

- cutting back on the number of days principals are called to the board office for meetings (this was mentioned by a trustee whose board is organized around families of schools);
- ensuring no central emails go out to P/VPs before 3 p.m. so they can focus on task at hand. Emails can either go before 8 a.m. or after 3 p.m.;
- increasing turnaround time to qualify for some board and Ministry initiatives and to meet the reporting requirements associated with them;
- providing a policy which clearly defines the scope of PVP work;
- streamlining communications and allowing principals to focus on improving student achievement;
- providing principals with an operational manual (as does one northern board) containing templates and sample letters aimed at reducing the time required by principals to deal with predictable, routine, tasks.

5. To what extent do you think the workload of P/VPs is excessive?

Trustees’ opinions on this question were not uniform and most were couched with caveats. Overall, there was unanimous agreement that P/VP workload was substantial, as well as stress producing, albeit with a lot of individual variation. As one trustee explained, “my board has many principals who will go on stress leave but many will not – expectations are extremely high”. Differences in the size of boards, another trustee explained, means different P/VP “realities”; in smaller boards, principals take on tasks that superintendents normally assume in larger boards.

Whether P/VP workload was “excessive” (rather than substantial) seemed more debatable. For example, one trustee believed P/VPs’ workload was commensurate with their pay (“they are well paid”), while another pointed out that the differences between the highest paid
teacher and the first grade P/VP is increasingly small, “so we can’t say definitively that they are paid enough for the amount of work that they do relative to what’s coming at them”.

One of the more important organizational consequences of excessive P/VP workload, trustees pointed out, was that “It’s increasingly hard to fill principal and vice-principal roles due to wages increases….The problem lies mainly with vice-principal positions. Once again, it’s harder to fill administrative staff positions due to the salary increases of all unionized (non-administrative) staff.”

Another trustee explained that P/VP workload, as defined by law, is quite different than P/VP workload based on current expectations. By law (the Education Act was cited) the role of the principal as it is defined is not excessive:

It’s actually very reasonable, but it’s everything else that has come to be expected over time that makes the role excessive. Go back to amalgamation of school boards and how that changed the role, by default, not by choice. They [P/VPs] willingly step up to respond to the needs of their community. So by definition it’s a very reasonable role but the reality is that’s not all of what they do.

Collective bargaining has also added significantly to P/VPs’ work over the last 15 years. Trustees pointed, for example, to reduction of teacher supervision time, reduction in the number of allowable staff meetings, increases in teacher preparation time, limits on professional development time, and unpaid teacher leaves. As one trustee said, “anytime workload is reduced for staff below the principal position, something gets added to the principals’ plate”.

In addition to these explanations for why principal and vice-principal work has been increasing, trustees also mentioned:

- challenges involved in reducing teacher supervision time, the cost associated with bringing in a third person, and the repercussions on safety of students;
- the negative effects on teacher-P/VP relationships (and accompanying increases in workload) of removing school administrators from the teacher union. This change also introduced additional P/VP management responsibilities which reduced the interest of some teachers in taking on school administrator positions;
- the introduction of standard provincial achievement measures (through EQAO) by which to judge the progress of individual schools and the accompanying pressure on
school administrators to be publically accountable for improving student achievement in their schools on such measures.\(^{42}\)

6. **What kinds of things are especially important if P/VPs are to do their jobs effectively?**

Trustees had a handful of suggestions to make in response to this question:

- Better resourcing of schools to let principals focus on instructional leadership;
- Professional development which reflects the needs of the board and children – “we are in a situation where there is no real apprenticeship for the job”;
- Provide principals and vice-principals with mentoring opportunities;
- Build a culture within schools that encourages open dialogue with staff and contributes to a culture of trust;
- Make sure that P/VPs know that they have the support of senior administrators and trustees.

Finally, one trustee explained that his/her board buffers principals from some of the challenges associated with the implementation of Regulation 274. This board asks principals not to deal with union issues related to Regulation 274, but to forward them to the Human Resources Department for direct interpretation because the new contract is so complicated: “we have 30 schools, we can’t have 30 interpretations going on”. This practice may now be widespread, according to another trustee.

7. **What typically stands in the way of P/VPs providing their schools with the leadership needed to improve student achievement and well-being?**

Trustees pointed to seven features of the context in which P/VPs work as challenging P/VP efforts to improve student achievement and well-being:

- *Special education*: time consumed dealing with special education issues (“parents complain on a daily basis”).
- *Out-of-school meetings*: When P/VPs are pulled out of their schools their work piles up (“it’s kind of like a job that is never done – there’s always something to do”).

\(^{42}\) One trustee commented that “Principals became easy targets for the Ministry brain waves with dollars attached”.

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• **Some collective agreements:** The restrictive nature of some collective agreements (“We don’t have control over individual PD. It’s become a very sensitive issue. I think that’s unhelpful.”)

• **Inadequate resources:** Although not true in all boards, diminishing resources take away expertise required to improve student achievement; this is expertise in the form of support staff (administrative assistants, custodial staff), good technological equipment, guidance and library resources, Special Education and ESL staff. Losses of these resources create additional stress and work for P/VPs.

Administrative resources are also in short supply according to some trustees, especially in the case of very large schools and very small schools. In small schools, one administrator is typically responsible for the same number of tasks as several administrators in larger schools. In very large schools (e.g., one trustee spoke about a K-5 school of 1200 students), the number and complexity of organizational challenges can easily consume all the time available to P/VPs, leaving little if any time to address instructional improvement.

• **Union grievances:** In some boards, union grievances continue to grow (“principals trying to mediate all of this with their superintendents and not being able to meet with parents or get to the instructional piece”). However, not all boards involve their principals to the same extent. Senior staff in some boards manage most of the grievances. Federations are more demanding for principals about many of the challenges they face (“last year was a nightmare for P/VPs”).

• **Restrictive student assessment options:** Limitations were placed on P/VP decisions about student assessment resulting from Bill 155 (Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning). One trustee had this to say about the consequences of the bill:

> If the goal and role of P/VPs is to improve student achievement and well-being, then it is their goal, role and responsibility to establish assessment and to interpret assessment and to do all of those things in consultation and in cooperation with other stakeholders, and whoever has the role in the classroom. Give it back to teachers! The minute that became even a conversation it’s extremely troubling” …why are we negotiating those things? If that was local bargaining and they came to the board and put that on the table, people would

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43 One trustee argued that “there should be thresholds where at a certain size the board receives the full funding for a bare minimum of principals and a vice-principal. That is not the case presently. There are short falls which in turn increases the workload to the staff P and VP in schools.”
Another trustee said that “We need to tell the government that certain teacher tasks are not negotiable….but in real life, that’s not the case”.

- **EQAO testing procedures**: Lack of uniform procedures exist for administering EQAO tests. One trustee claimed that “nobody does the same kind of testing throughout the board. You don’t get results in the same way; you don’t get the same data comparisons that we used to get before”.

8. **How can trustees best support P/VP efforts to improve student achievement and well-being?**

The relatively small number of responses to this question was largely because the interviewer asked them only to identify actions that had not already been identified as sources of workload competing for P/VPs’ school improvement time.

One respondent expressed a sense of frustration about his/her opportunities to provide support because lines of communication between trustees and P/VPs flow through senior administration “which is a nightmare for all boards”. Another believed that hiring the best person for P/VP jobs was key and described the makeup of his/her board’s hiring committees. These committees were made up of representation from the school council, a student trustee, a teacher from the school, and parents of the school community at large involved. Selections by such committees have to be unanimous.

Trustees, it was also suggested, could do more to challenge the Ministry for the support that is needed to implement many provincial initiatives. System principals supporting their colleagues with the implementation of initiatives in specific areas of the curriculum was also believed to be an important source of support endorsed by some trustees. Finally, a focus group with P/VPs and trustees once or twice a year “with a dedicated approach to people development where you dialogue about workload issues and policy implementation” was suggested.
9. Do principals have enough autonomy to decide what’s important and what isn’t important to do over the course of the day?

Most of the responses to this question were not about P/VP autonomy as something any stakeholder made a conscious decision about. Rather, they were about the “blizzard” of decisions and tasks demanded of P/VPs by the typical organizational contexts in which they found themselves.

One trustee described how possibilities for autonomy were eroded by the lack of full time principals in some boards with very small schools. In public French-language school boards, many principals teach half-time and do administrative work the other half; most schools in those boards do not have vice-principals. One trustee described another example as follows:

*We also have a situation where one person is a principal of two different schools that are 30 or 40 kilometers apart. How is he present in those two communities and they are two different communities? He has to deal with both communities. Nobody wants his job... It’s the budget line that drives this. The job description must be very clear when it’s posted. Those are the realities of a lack of schools in the system and schools become regional schools with a very big catchment area. Most principals in this situation don’t really teach real classes. They mainly perform special education tasks and some guidance in order to give them flexibility.*

Trustees noted that a principal with .5 teaching duties and .5 administrative responsibilities still has to establish connections in the school community, develop partnerships within the community, attend events and the like. These community connections, requiring work outside the school, are particularly time consuming “in northern boards where 90% of the students are bussed to school”. The size and location of boards in the north could be a challenge to recruit teachers. Many have no pool to recruit from and have to pay additional bonuses to attract some teachers.44

In the last round of provincial teacher negotiations, nepotism was cited by OECTA as a significant factor in hiring decisions. Regulation 274 was intended, among other things, to help solve that problem. However, Regulation 274 was cited by trustees as a significant frustration to principals because of the limitations it placed on their hiring decisions. One trustee explained the source of the frustration this way:

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44 According to several trustees, every school board should have someone (manager) to take care of the building so that the principal can take care of safety and highest achievement for students.
Principals no longer have the ability to hire who you think is the right person, not the most senior person, for your school. I think that’s a catastrophic decision with huge impact on the principal because while you are the instructional leader you should be accountable to the people that you hire and if you hire the wrong one you have to do something about it – but regulation 274 obviously obligates that.

Another trustee added that Regulation 274:

...contradicts student success. You put Regulation 274 in the context of [the province’s desire to move from] “great to excellent” and it’s such a contradiction. How can we go from great to excellent if we can’t hire the best teacher in the circumstance? The teacher is a critical part.

Rather than continue with Regulation 274, trustees’ preferred solution to the nepotism problem (which, in some trustees’ opinions, did not seem to be widespread,) was to develop defensible board hiring policies.

Trustees had two further suggestions for how to provide principals with more time for school improvement, if not more autonomy. One suggestion was to add business administrators to at least some school staffs. One trustee spoke about a principal in one Ontario school system who had a “bursar” with power to control budget and with very limited restrictions on supervision. Also mentioned was the practice in some U.S. districts of assigning an administrator to deal with business issues in place of a vice-principal. But as one trustee noted, “the U.S. approach doesn’t fit in any budget line in Ontario. There’s less flexibility for smaller schools where business administrator could not fill in to teach the French program because the French teacher had to leave suddenly”.

The final suggestion, mentioned above, from trustees about increasing P/VP autonomy was to clearly define principals’ responsibilities (“clearly define the scope of work through the support of the ministry, and give principals the autonomy to do the job otherwise there will always be a push and pull”).

10. **What other recommendations about P/VP workload do you have for the Ministry?**

Trustees offered six recommendations to the Ministry in response to this question, as follows:

- *Predictable planning cycles*: Trustees recommended that the Ministry plan its initiatives in predictable cycles, cycles well known to district and school leaders, instead of having initiatives downloaded constantly (and perhaps unexpectedly) to boards.
• **P/VP training**: Both initial and continuing professional development for principals and vice-principals, trustees suggested, should be an ongoing priority for both boards and the Ministry.

• **Succession planning**: One trustee noted that boards were “not identifying people early enough and giving them productive [leadership development] opportunities”. Part of the problem, according to this trustee, is that teachers moving to formal school administrative positions cannot return to teaching without losing credit for their past teaching experience; this presents a significant risk to those uncertain about the suitability of the job for them.

• **Re-craft election platform approaches to education**: One trustee advocated not tying elections to specific education issues:

> If we want to put stability in the system, we can’t be bouncing all over the place every time we have an election. We have to have a new approach completely. It’s not just a question of principals and VPs. It’s a question of how do we see education of our children? We see it first as a party winning in an election – we have to have an arms-length system of some kind.

• **Re-balance stakeholder power**: Several trustees spoke about the consequences of significant power imbalance between principals’ associations and teacher federations:

> One of the questions is the legal status of CPCO, OPC, and ADFO. Because they formed associations for their own benefit, they don’t have status with the Ministry in the same way as the teacher unions. They are not certified as a bargaining unit. They are left in this place of limbo - they don’t have the right to strike and they don’t have the right for any job action - which is wonderful but declaring education an essential service. If a strike is outside of the mandate and resolution is the only option, as it is with our terms and conditions with our principals and VPs right now, we have different standards of relationships They have no teeth, other than to find a solution. There is a clear power imbalance. They know best the workload and the issues and it’s not pennies and nickels and I do believe them to be genuine professionals. The associations’ terms and conditions are at the local level whereas the terms and conditions of all other unionized staff are at the provincial level – I don’t know where it fits.

• **Clarify trustee roles**: Several trustees believed more should be done to clarify the role of trustees. Many trustees, they believed, took Bill 177 to mean they that they should stay out of their boards’ operational issues and P/VPs are an “operational issue”. Said one, “we do policy and leave it to the director to [mange issues concerning P/VPs]”. 
7. Director of Education Focus Group Results
A procedure for collecting data from directors of education was developed in collaboration with members of the CODE executive. This procedure entailed organizing all directors of education in attendance at their association’s annual general meeting into about 8 focus groups of from 4 to 10 people each - a total of 65 directors. Seven questions evident in the report of results in this section were provided to each participant, and a handwritten record of the interview was kept by one member of each group\(^{45}\).

This method of data collection is well designed to identify a relatively comprehensive set of workload demands faced by principals and vice-principals. It does not, however, allow for the determination of which demands matter most. Nor does this method provide results that are known to be representative of the full population of the province’s directors.

1. Primary Sources Of Principal And Vice-principal Workload
Directors pointed to seven sources of principal and vice-principal workload, as follows:

1.1 Students
- Discipline associated with growing student needs, behavior issues and intervention, along with the paper work required of the safe school regulations
- Student recruitment
- Leading the improvement of student achievement
- Special needs responsibilities such as accommodation of student needs and staff work refusal

1.2 Parents and Larger Community
- Contacts with parents about issues in the school
- Efforts required to foster parent engagement
- The challenges associated with that engagement.
- Community expectations

\(^{45}\) The records of the conversations in each group were provided to the research team in point form and this accounts for the abbreviated, point-form description of results in this section.
1.3 School Staff

- Time required for instructional leadership including classroom visits and the collection and use of quality measures
- Management issues, especially those associated with personnel (staff hiring, evaluation and supervision, coverage, safety)
- Pedagogical influence and quality measures
- Mental health issues, including those of staff
- Development and maintenance of Professional Learning Communities
- Application of collective agreement for each group in school
- Program implementation
- Working with LNS student achievement officers on improving student achievement

1.4 School Organization

- Day to day operations, reporting, health and safety
- Risk management
- Before and after school duties
- Accommodation boundary reviews
- Monitoring legislation compliance (e.g. health, security)
- Maintenance and plant
- Communication with all stakeholders
- Financial processes associated with the school budget
- Mediation of disputes
- Impact of social media on students and the wider community
- Ongoing responsibility for maintaining Catholic identity and relationships
- Managing the use of communication technology so that it does not add to workload
- Increased expectations regarding Ministry and board initiatives (e.g. Full Day Kindergarten, childcare)
1.5 Unions
- managing collective agreements and labor relations
- Increased number of statutes, regulations and PPMs that result from collective bargaining processes

1.6 School System
- System responsibilities such as travel for meetings and implementing Regulation 274
  - community/agency partnerships and use of facilities
- Board committees
- Senior staff requests and relationships
- Providing information required for accountability to ministry and board

1.7 Personal Issues
- Professional development
- A work ethic that puts family first

2. Reasons For Principal And Vice-principal Workload Increase In The Last 5 To 10 Years.

Most directors believed that principal and vice-principal workload had increased, in some cases significantly, over the past decade and identified three sets of reasons for this increase, as follows (these are largely a continuation of the responses to the previous question):

2.1 New Responsibilities
- Multiple initiatives have been added but few have been removed resulting in greater responsibility and workload
- Extensive use is now made of information technology 24 hours a day, every day
- Principals in some systems now do all lunch supervision; they do not have a guaranteed 40-minute lunch break like union members. This means in a week a principal could have from 200 to 300 minutes of supervision (e.g., recesses, before/after school, bus duty) (the extent of this workload is at least partly under district control)
• Increased ministry initiatives mean greater administration of special funding
• Principals are pulled out of their schools to learn about these new initiatives and their implementation
• Principals are more involved in improving student achievement by providing curriculum leadership in their own schools

2.2 Increased Expectations and Accountability
• All areas of responsibility and accountability have expanded beyond what is reasonable for one individual to manage (requires a collaboration environment)
• Responsibility and accountability for improving instruction has increased - there is greater pressures to perform, for example, by improving school test scores
• More accountability for increased numbers of management tasks (e.g., fundraising, Health and Safety - new principals need full Health and Safety training
• More complex specialized student needs to be addressed by the school
• Reduced non-teaching staffing allocations
• Increased parent demands, expectations and involvement
• Pressure to sustain student enrolment

2.3 Changes in the Regulatory Environment
• Reduction of management rights
• More emphasis on regulatory compliance
• More unionized work environment
• The need to work effectively with school councils

3. Measures To Reduce Unreasonable Levels Of Principal And Vice-principal Workload
   Directors pointed to seven categories of actions they undertake to reduce the extent of principal and vice-principal workload when that workload becomes unreasonable.

3.1 Review district expectations
• Review the district calendar;
• Analyze existing board support to determine if it can be improved
• Review initiatives creating workload with members of the senior team
• Review support plans annually
• Audit and quantify the demands being placed on principals and vice-principals

3.2 Align and balance what the system/district is expecting of its schools and school leaders
• Streamline management processes and reduce duplication
• Structure directors’ meetings so they are coordinated with principals’ meetings with their staffs
• Set priorities for the system and its schools and focus most effort on those priorities
• Promote an understanding among principals and vice-principals about how to do more with less
• Buffer principals and vice-principals from some external demands that do not align with either district or school priorities - help principals and vice-principals see “the big picture”, the larger context in which initiatives are being undertaken to assist their sense-making
• Remind principals and vice-principals to align their activities with their school improvement plans
• Help principals and vice-principals find areas of cohesion among initiatives and assist them in consolidating their initiatives around their schools’ strengths

3.3 Increase efficiencies and streamline work processes
• Establish efficient work processes
• Use technology (e.g., Adobe video conference and teleconference) as a means of limiting travel time for principals and vice-principals
• Ensure adequate allocation of funding for information technology so schools have access to the information they need
• Provide workshops on how to increase efficiencies
• Encourage principals and vice-principals to learn efficiencies from others (e.g., during PD opportunities to “recharge their batteries”)
• Provide online learning opportunities so principals and vice-principals can participate at their own pace and at a time suitable for them
• Hold principal meetings every second month, instead of every month
• Set firm dates for meetings and stick to them in order to respect the time of principals and vice-principals

3.4 Reduce principals’ and vice-principals’ tasks and provide other forms of relief
• Reduce the number of meetings
• Reduce committee work
• Keep principals in their schools as much as possible
• Establish occasional moratoriums (e.g., no one taken out of school at certain times, no email, “meeting free days”)
• Provide lieu days
• Ensure that designated holidays are not eroded with school or system work.
• Reduce volume of emails (e.g., no emails on weekends)
• Provide lunch time supervisors
• Encourage longer tenure of principals in schools
• Adjust timelines to make meeting them easier

3.5 Add support for principals and vice-principals to do their jobs
• Bring in additional support to schools (e.g., community and mental health leads)
• Bring retired administrators in to assist principals and vice-principals
• Provide more superintendent support
• Assign some superintendents only school responsibilities
• Increase secretarial time and other forms of administrative support in schools
• Allocate vice-principals to schools without them (according to directors, these additional vice-principals would also need to teach in order for this measure to be financially viable)
• Assist with the loneliness of the role by providing vice-principal and superintendent support
• Invite principals associations to speak with principals and vice-principals on a regular basis
• Affirm that the board will support principals as they carry out their professional duties “

3.6 Professional learning
• Provide professional learning in areas that principals and vice-principals feel uncertain about (e.g., finance)
• Ensure the availability of PD funds for principals and vice-principals
• Ensure that mentoring programs provide principals and vice-principals with adequate support

3.7 Provide individual consultation and counseling
• Acknowledge the concerns about workload of principals and vice-principals
• Seek ways of providing differentiated support
• Listen, validate whoever you are listening to (individual or numbers) - treat principals and vice-principals like management
• Collaborate with principals and vice-principals in the processes of change
• Encourage principals and vice-principals to make useful changes to their practices
• Invite input from principals and vice-principals and demonstrate their worth
• Respond to issues with compassion and empathy
• Have individual conversations to help them manage their work
• Counsel them (they don’t need to know it all)
• Establish a wellness committee to help principals and vice-principals cope with workload stresses and establish suitable work/life balance
4. The Extent To Which Principal And Vice-principal Workload Has A Negative Influence On Their Efforts To Provide School Improvement Leadership

Directors’ responses suggested three answers to this question: workload is a huge impediment to school improvement leadership; workload is a significant challenge, but can be managed; workload is significant, but need not get in the way of the main priority.

4.1 Workload is a major impediment to school improvement efforts. Responses expressing this general view identified the tiring nature of school administrator work, the lack of time to do such work, the many distractions to school improvement work, increases in mental health issues to be addressed in some fashion by principals and vice-principals, and the dearth of services available to deal with the social and emotional issues of students and staff. Also noted as part of this leadership context were unreasonably tight timelines and multiple directions for action.

4.2 Workload is a challenge but it can be managed skilfully. Responses consistent with this perspective noted situational differences in principal and vice-principal contexts, some much more difficult than others to address. These responses also raised the need for assistance to principals and vice-principals in making appropriate decisions about how to spend their time and energies, along with the need to match school administrators’ capacities with schools in which such capacities would be most useful.

4.3 School improvement is the work and other work should take a back seat. Reflecting this perspective, some directors held the view that effective principals are able to manage the workload and continue to effectively lead an improvement agenda. It is the responsibility of principals and vice-principals themselves to manage their own workloads properly, place instructional leadership at the top of their priorities for allocating time, and deal with operational tasks quickly and efficiently.
5. The Helpfulness of Principal Mentoring Programs In Addressing Workload Issues for New Principals.

Most directors held a positive view of their system’s mentoring programs for new principals. According to these respondents, their mentoring programs help establish a sense of community among their school leaders, provide support structures for new principals and help them understand system priorities. These programs were also believed to be one antidote for feelings of isolation in the new role (especially for principals in schools without vice-principals), assist principals with their school improvement planning and provide learning opportunities in many areas in which mentees need professional development (e.g., time management strategies).

Some directors also pointed to significant shortcomings of their mentoring programs. Mentoring initiatives are time consuming and require considerable flexibility on the part of the mentors. Furthermore, it is sometimes the more experienced principals that struggle. No mentoring program will reduce the distractions to providing school improvement leadership. Several directors did not think their mentoring programs dealt with workload issues very well.

6. Effects of Principal and Vice-principal Workload on Recruitment and Selection of New Principals and Vice-principals.

Responding to this question, one director said “Not in this system”; this director pointed to his/her system’s solid succession planning, differentiated levels of leadership training, availability of mentoring opportunities, and the general encouragement and support provided for new leaders.

Most other directors were more circumspect in their responses, especially about recruitment for secondary school administrators (“the secondary VP role is not very attractive”). Factors in addition to workload identified by directors as increasing the recruitment challenge included compensation (very little remuneration for the amount of work), and job security (giving up membership in the teacher union, and the chances of being assigned to a school a significant distance from one’s home). Expansion of role responsibilities, as detailed in earlier responses, was viewed as a major contributor to workload; the role has expanded and changed so dramatically and become all-encompassing that the role is not desirable. According to some respondents, “Good principals and educators want to remain in the classroom as there is a negative perception about the workload with the role”.
To encourage teachers to consider entering school administrative roles, in spite of challenges such as those outlined above, directors said that they have to:

- ensure that “messaging” about the roles is positive
- offer system support and active forms of recruitment
- assist with the cost of the course work required for a teacher to qualify for a principal or vice-principal position
- provide a good district leadership development program
- affirm those who are young and new to the role

7. How the Workload Of Principals And Vice-Principals Compares to other Middle Managers

Most directors considered the workload of principals and vice-principals to be substantial and increasing at a rapid rate. Principals, it was noted for example, now have many commitments, often work evenings and weekends and sometimes travel as part of their work. Furthermore, their workload is not governed by union regulations of the sort protecting teacher workload: it is also quite stressful, in part, because principals and vice-principals manage many people, have multiple priorities, face multiple demands and are subject to many distractions from their core work.
8. Synthesis and Conclusions

In the early stages of both this study and the parallel study of teacher workload, five questions were identified as important for both studies to answer about the workload of those in the positions (teacher, school administrator) they were investigating. In the case of this study, these questions (slightly adapted and so reduced to four) were:

1. What are the main factors (personal, district, Ministry) challenging the manageability of principal and vice-principal workload?
2. What factors (personal, district, Ministry) help keep principal and vice-principal workload relatively manageable?
3. What changes (unions, district, Ministry) might better support principals to manage workload?
4. What professional learning or training might be helpful to principals in managing workload?

The Principal and Vice-principal Workload Study asked five additional questions unique to the school administrators’ roles:

1. What strategies do principals and vice-principals use for coping with workload?
2. How does workload influence principal and vice-principal responses to personal illness?
3. Does principal and vice-principal workload have a significant influence on recruiting teachers for school administrative roles?
4. How can the work of principals and vice-principals be made more satisfying and productive?
5. What factors should be considered when implementing a new provincial or board initiative?

In this final section of the report, evidence from all relevant sources is summarized in response to these questions.

1. What are the main factors challenging the manageability of principal and vice-principal workload?

Table 8.1 combines results reported separately in Tables 4.1 (Interview Results) and 5.2 (Survey Results). These tables summarize those variables or factors that contribute most, overall,
to principal and vice-principal workload\(^{46}\) (the Independent Variables in the framework for this study). Interview results pointed to 15 such factors, while the survey results identified 13\(^{47}\). Approximately half of the factors are common to both sets of data including:

- **School improvement focus** (items 1, 2 and 3 in both data sets). These factors contributing substantially to workload include: allocating the time needed for school improvement work while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively; the effort required to build the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals; the effort required for principals and vice-principals to develop the capacities they need themselves to lead improvement initiatives in their schools.

- **Provincial policies and regulations** (item 7 from the survey data and items 4, 5 and 6 from the interview data). Respondents attributed significant additions to their workload to the influence Regulation 274 has had on staffing issues, along with the administration of policies related to Safe Schools.

- **School board/system/district** (item 8 from both data sets). The volume of email communications received from central office staff was identified as a constant and sometimes overwhelming addition to their workload. This factor was much more than a routine annoyance; many respondents viewed it as a distraction from their school improvement work and one that placed them in a reactive rather than proactive position much of the time.

- **Unions and contracts** (items 9 through 12 from the interview data and item 10 from the survey data). Much of what was attributed in our categorizing and coding to Provincial policies and regulations might as easily have been attributed to Unions and contracts. This overlap is especially evident in Table 8.1. Survey item 10, “Union contracts sometimes seem to contradict what is in the students’ best interests” is essentially a summary of the substance of items 9 through 12 from the interviews. Unions and some contracts were viewed, for example, as often compromising safety, reducing

\(^{46}\) For the interview results, this is any variable identified by at least 20% of interviewees. For the survey results, this is any variable rated 3 or above on a 4-point scale about the extent of impact on workload (4 = very extensive)

\(^{47}\) Factors contributing to workload were not always viewed as “negative” or somehow “bad”. Many were considered a normal and expected part of the job, but sources of workload nonetheless. Those factors viewed in a more negative light were typically factors that distracted principals and vice-principals from their priorities or created what they considered to be unnecessary work.
opportunities for teachers’ professional development, reducing timetabling flexibility and contributing to lack of cooperation on the part of some teachers.48

Table 8.1
Factors Challenging the Manageability of Principal and Vice-principal Workload

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Survey Results</th>
<th>Interview Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIP Focus</td>
<td>1. Finding time for staff to meet and work together in the context of current contractual regulations while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively</td>
<td>1. Allocating the time needed for school improvement work (e.g. planning around multiple goals) while still ensuring that school operations are managed effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Building the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals</td>
<td>2. Significant effort required to build the capacities needed by staff to achieve improvement goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Developing the capacities you need to lead the school improvement initiatives</td>
<td>3. Efforts required to develop the capacities needed to lead the school improvement initiatives; stressful preparing materials and ensuring that PLCs are facilitated properly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Complexity of the work created by the need to assist teachers to implement new approaches to instruction while ensuring them the discretion they need to do their best work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Managing the sometimes unrealistic expectations of some parents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Persuading some staff and students of the need for the school’s improvement initiatives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>7. Regulation 274 and the hiring challenges which distract from a focus on school improvement</td>
<td>4. Regulation 274 and the staffing procedures designed by senior management to comply (these procedures influence operational issues at school level if the wrong person is hired). Regulation 274 adds an incredible amount of workload for admins, tasks to manage LTOs, conducting LTO interviews, doing performance appraisals – challenging to deal with the union if a wrong person gets hired - very frustrating; principals are getting staff placed in their schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Heavy documentation involved in violence in the workplace and all forms associated with health and safety, safe schools, lock down policies (these are important but add</td>
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</table>

48 Some members of the project advisory committee identified additional sources of workload; these appear on page 26.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Survey Results</th>
<th>Interview Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>significantly to workload and it takes time to do the training involved in understanding each new initiative)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Safe schools policy – lack of consistency in understanding the policy (increases workload as admin maintains an active visibility in the building even when there’s a teacher on duty for students’ safety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System/ District</td>
<td>8. Volume of emails received daily</td>
<td>7. Too many memos and emails from district increase workload and distracts principals – untimely emails result in admins becoming reactive as opposed to being proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Numbers of new programs and policies to be implemented in your school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>10. Sometimes seem to contradict what is in the students’ best interests</td>
<td>8. Safety in school is compromised by limits on supervision - 80-minute limit on duty scheduling means P/VP may be doing yard supervision before and after school hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Limits on PD (once a month) hinders school activities and increases workload (e.g., meeting with small groups of people when they are willing, chasing staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Key feature of the teacher contract is about timetabling and ensuring everybody receives fair and equitable prep time and teaching load (even more difficult scheduling with French and English panel). This also applies to supervision schedules (e.g., duty schedules have to be aligned with safety) and it takes time earlier on to schedule. But once done this helps to reduce workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. Regulation 274 is the worst piece of regulation – hiring practices for occasional teachers is a serious problem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12. Contracts increase workload when they prevent staff from being flexible and willing to support kids – (e.g., teachers who feel unappreciated tend to become embedded in union practices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Leadership</td>
<td>12. Preferred approaches to leading and organizing (e.g., open door policy, collaborative decision making processes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Knowledge of effective approaches to instruction</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

85
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Survey Results</th>
<th>Interview Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>13. New staff members and teachers new to their role (e.g., admin has to do PAs for LTO teachers on NTIP, pairing new staff with mentors, coaching, monitoring their progress, supporting them to deal with their emotions as they deal with difficult kids for the first time)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Some mid-career and late-career staff members (e.g., increase workload when they do not want to implement practices called for by the school improvement plan or need to be mentored in order to make such changes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Work</td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Time spent at the board level attending meetings takes time away from the building, increases workload and interferes with teaching and administration time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **What factors help keep principal and vice-principal workload relatively manageable?**

Together, the principal and vice-principal interviews and surveys pointed to nine factors that made significant contributions to the manageability of workload. Importantly, five of these factors were very much under the control of principals and vice-principals themselves, including:

- Relationship-building skills: these skills were considered especially important because of the “people-intensive” nature of the school administrators’ job, something noted not only by principal and vice-principal respondents, but by trustees and directors as well.

- High expectations for your own and your staff’s performance, as well as the performance of your students: a strong desire to do the very best possible job drives school administrators to ensure their schools are well-run.

- Willingness to delegate to, or share leadership with, others: this disposition distributes some of the workload that would otherwise fall to the principal and vice-principal while taking advantage of the range of capacities available among other staff members.

49 As some members of the project’s advisory committee noted, there are significant limitations faced by principals and vice-principals in delegating or sharing leadership, not least the contractual regulations governing the nature and extent of teachers’ work. The extent to which leadership can be distributed is restricted by the existing workloads of those to whom such leadership might be distributed.
Experience in the role: significant experience as a principal and vice-principal generates confidence in one’s ability to carry out the role; it also informs one’s practices because a significant level of expertise has been developed for responding efficiently to many routine tasks. Experience also often results in more autonomy to make decisions as others come to trust one’s judgment. According to some administrators, experience also results in a better balance between work and family life because the job is placed in a broader perspective.

Trustees pointed out that a significant proportion of the province’s principals and vice-principals are relatively new to their roles. These administrators face a steep learning curve, one that makes each new task much more time consuming than it is for their more experienced peers.

- Allow principals and vice-principals the autonomy they need to do the job: trustees advocated for such autonomy and respect. As one said: 
  
  *It has to be clearly articulated that this group of people are ...the ones that wear student success day in day out – give them the credit and the confidence to manage their instructional community.*

- Advisory work outside the school: often conducted in teams, committees and task forces typically for the district or province, this work adds to one’s professional learning and provides opportunities to understand education in the system and province.

Two additional factors contribute significantly to the manageability of principal and vice-principal workload:

- High performing school office staff, teaching staff and leadership team members: eager staff willing to “chip in”, support each other and embrace ongoing learning help with workload.

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50 “Autonomy” is a multifaceted concept as it was mentioned in this study, as well as how it used in the broader literature. But evidence collected about it in this study does not allow for fine-grained distinctions. For example, it is not clear whether principals’ desires for greater autonomy were in reference to restrictions with legal or policy roots, as distinct from more malleable operating procedures, or preferred ways of doing business, developed by their districts.

51 This suggestion is a nuanced one. For it to be productive, as some members of the advisory committee noted, greater autonomy should depend on greater capacity and experience - what is sometimes called “earned autonomy”.
• Supportive central office staff: these members of the central office facilitate principal and vice-principal work when relationships with them (especially the director and superintendents) are open and fluid. Central office staff help keep workload manageable when they are aware of the needs of the school, are very responsive and listen carefully to the needs, concerns and advice of principals and vice-principals. Both directors and trustees echoed these views.

3. What professional learning or training might be helpful to principals in managing workload?

Although it did not explore this question directly, evidence from the study has at least three implications for the professional learning of principals and vice-principals.

Differentiated training unique to the nature and amount of work anticipated by school assignments. While on-the-job experiences are widely believed to be the most powerful sources of leadership learning, those experiences provide opportunities for acquiring some of the capacities needed by school leaders in most professional circumstances, as well as some capacities uniquely useful in the specific contexts of that experience. Each practicing school administrator also possesses a set of leadership “resources” likely to be, in some measure, unique because they are “personal.” The main implication of unique existing leadership capacities is that districts attend closely to the individual learning needs of their school leaders. As experience in the role grows, the chances of a one-size-fits-all leadership learning initiative being useful diminishes.

Evidence from this study points to many common sources of workload for school leaders, but it also highlights organizational contexts that demand unique responses from principals and vice-principals. Different school sizes, different family conditions and different local community contexts, for example, clearly make different demands on principals and vice-principals. These data suggest the possibility of creating a classification of school profiles each of which makes different demands on school leaders’ capacities. Profiles such as these might then be used to help prepare leaders for their school assignments.

52 As reflected, for example, in the Ontario Leadership Framework
53 Also see the Ontario Leadership Framework for an explanation of “Personal Leadership Resources”
Productively managing multiple initiatives. While evidence from this study strongly recommends, to districts and to the Ministry, a substantial reduction in the number of initiatives that schools are expected to implement at any one time (see below), it is unlikely that such reductions will fully solve the problem from the perspective of principals and vice-principals. Managing multiple initiatives is a challenge experienced by school administrators in most educational jurisdictions. As Hatch noted in his study:

For principals, tasks like managing trade-offs and negotiating down demands are a regular part of their work, but become particularly problematic and important when they have to deal with the evolving expectations and shifting personnel that can come with multiple initiatives. For administrators, the challenges of communicating across departments and carving out meaningful roles in implementation are exacerbated as they learn about the unique requirements and expectations of different programs and respond to changing district and state expectations (page 412).

So how to manage multiple initiatives should be considered a problem for which systematic training is provided - training about both solution processes and effective solutions.

Rebalancing the focus of initial preparation. This balancing or rebalancing needs to be between the knowledge and skill related to curriculum, instruction and assessment (the typical focus for “instructional leadership”), and the knowledge and skill required to enact those operational functions necessary to the development of a supportive organizational infrastructure; such operational functions, it should be noted, contribute as significantly to improvements in student performance as do those practices typically associated with “instructional leadership”.

This balancing or rebalancing would be assisted, at least modestly, by re-framing the central image of the school administrators’ role from the “provision of instructional leadership” to the adoption of a “learning imperative”. Considerable evidence in the past has suggested that school administrators have typically adopted a “managerial imperative” toward their work, and much of the advocacy for an image of the principal as an “instructional leader” has been an effort to change that managerial imperative. But there is little evidence that a narrow focus on the

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54 See, for example, Hatch (2001)
55 For the effects of principals’ operational tasks on student achievement see Horng et al (2010), for example.
56 Terosky (2014)
57 Cuban (1988)
classroom practices of teachers is productive for school leaders intent on improving their students’ achievement. Most formal models of instructional leadership\(^{58}\) are actually much more comprehensive than their labels suggest.

Successful school leaders, the bulk of existing evidence indicates, attend to instructional issues as well as the development and alignment of their organizations’ infrastructure to support the classroom and the school-wide practices needed for improving student achievement. The term “learning imperative” seems to reflect the mindset of these leaders, and is entirely consistent with the capacities associated with successful leadership in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*. The initial preparation of school leaders in the province should reflect the balance outlined here. Beginning principals’ workload would be much more manageable if they “hit the ground” with good background training in the efficient execution of operational functions within a “learning imperative” mindset.

### 4. What changes in district practice might better support principals to manage workload?

Evidence used to identify five promising changes in district practice comes from the survey results, as well as the focus group interviews with directors and trustees.

*Use principal and vice-principal job satisfaction as a key criterion for district decisions affecting schools.* Results of testing the model explaining principal and vice-principal estimates of, and attitudes toward, their workload (Figure 5.2) indicate that job satisfaction is central to the way school administrators view their work. When sources of workload measured by the surveys eroded job satisfaction, workload was viewed as less manageable and attitudes toward work were less positive; when those sources increased job satisfaction, workload was viewed as more manageable and attitudes were more positive. Job satisfaction, in sum, is pivotal to principal and vice-principal perceptions of the extent and nature of their workload. District leaders aiming to realize the full contribution of their school leader partners to achieving district goals would be well advised to carefully weigh the consequences of their initiatives on the job satisfaction of those leaders.

*Revise district expectations.* Directors indicated that they could review and possibly revise district expectations (e.g., review initiatives creating workload with members of the senior

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\(^{58}\) See, for example, Hallinger & Heck (1996)
team) and better align the work of the district and its schools (e.g., buffer principals and vice-principals from some external demands that do not align with either district or school priorities).

**Streamline work processes.** Directors also indicated that they could streamline work processes (e.g., use technology such as Adobe video conferencing and teleconferencing as a means of limiting travel time for principals and vice-principals) and reduce the tasks facing principals and vice-principals as, for example, the number of out-of-school meetings and committee work; they could also provide their school administrators with additional support in the form of consultation, counseling and professional development in areas of need.

**Focus on priorities.** Trustees spoke about limiting their own expectations of principals and vice-principals to “things that matter most for students”, allowing more autonomy for principals and vice-principals in their own schools, and managing the board through its strategic and operational plans. Trustees also indicated that school administrators’ workload could be reduced by helping to ensure that people were hired with the skills that schools needed, and providing additional training to principals and vice-principals. A number of suggestions of shorter term nature were also provided by trustees.

**Align resources for schools with equity in mind**[^59]. This proposed change in district practice is an implication from the results, rather than a direct outgrowth of a specific piece of evidence.

One of the suggestions for leader preparation outlined above (Question 3) recommended differentiated training matched to the profile of one’s school assignment. These profiles of different school types could also be used when determining levels of school resourcing. For example, a small school serving a large proportion of disadvantaged students with high levels of need and low levels of existing achievement located in communities with difficult access to social services is likely the most challenging assignment a principal can face. If resources do not allow a full time vice-principal and significant office and other support staff, it is quite unrealistic to expect a principal in such a context to do much more than respond to one crisis.

[^59]: This suggestion, it should be noted, is about aligning existing resources, not adding new resources. Districts have little control over their resources, as a whole, but more discretion about how those resources are distributed. Furthermore, district leaders, unlike some private-sector leaders, work in highly politicized environments requiring them to negotiate the distribution of resources with multiple interest groups while keeping in mind restrictions on resource distribution demanded by the province. Equitable resource distribution creates different winners and losers than does inequitable resource distribution, and often the losers in equitable redistributions have considerable political savvy and resources. So this implication of the study, while highly defensible on many grounds, is not an easy one to implement.
after another with no chance of engaging staff in significant school improvement efforts. School leaders’ role conflict and role ambiguity are likely to be extensive in such contexts leading to very low levels of job satisfaction. Failure to allocate resources in response to such challenging contexts, furthermore, is a clear violation of the province’s commitment to equity in educational provision.

5. What changes in Ministry practices and expectations might reduce the impact of principal workload?

Three clear answers to this question emerged from the results of this study. These answers all speak to an underlying view, attributed to many of those providing evidence for the study, that the province’s explicit intention of focusing the system’s efforts on a small number of important priorities has at least not contributed much to the manageability of their workload. While the province has limited its overall goals to a small number (e.g., improving student achievement, well-being, and graduation rates), these goals actually provide an “umbrella” for advocating almost any reasonable initiative; while they may serve as useful tools for communicating provincial intentions to the public, they do almost nothing to limit the number or nature of possible “things” schools might be asked to implement. So the three changes in Ministry practices and expectations flowing from this view are as follows:

Reduce the number of Ministry initiatives schools are required to implement over time and slow down the introduction of new initiatives. Few of those providing evidence for this study expect initiatives from the province to stop or go away, and most provincial initiatives are viewed by many as quite useful and certainly well-intentioned. But almost all of these initiatives take considerable time to implement in schools to the point at which they are actually making the contributions expected of them at the outset. The early stages of implementing most significant changes are often associated with a loss of performance, the so-called “implementation dip”. So if there is excessive churn in the system created by new initiatives being introduced before the previous initiatives have been well implemented, the long range trend in the system’s performance is likely to be downward. Reducing the number of initiatives and slowing down their introduction would be likely to improve the system’s performance, as well as making principal and vice-principal workload more manageable.

Resolve competing priorities among initiatives schools are required to implement. Some attempts have been made within the Ministry over the past two years to better manage initiatives
across branches and divisions so as not to overburden or confuse districts and schools about Ministry priorities. Evidence from this study strongly recommends substantially increasing such efforts. Furthermore, whether or not efforts to accomplish this goal have been successful needs to be judged by the understanding of those in schools and districts, not only the understanding of those in the Ministry. Several trustees, for example, pointed to “mixed messages” from the Ministry about its priorities and initiatives that had to be interpreted by principals (if not by board staff). The diversity found within many schools’ local communities was also considered to be a source of competing priorities. Several trustees said that “everything is changing and shifting”, a rich source of potential role ambiguity and role conflict for principals and vice-principals.

*Forecast future initiatives well in advance of their roll out.* A source of frustration for some of those in both schools and districts providing evidence for this study was uncertainty about what future initiatives from the Ministry they would be asked to accommodate. The workload associated with both the number and rate of introduction of new initiatives was exacerbated by being unable to anticipate and prepare for such initiatives. For these respondents, something like a calendar forecasting when changes could be expected two or three years ahead of their introduction would be of considerable value.

*Cede much more autonomy to districts to determine future priorities for their schools.* Evidence from this study suggests that principal and vice-principal workload is approaching, if not already exceeding, what can reasonably be expected even from a cohort of exceptionally dedicated school administrators. Indeed, under some circumstances described during the study, it would be quite unrealistic to expect any principal and vice-principal to have time left for engaging staffs in school improvement.

If, as the study suggests, there is absolutely no school leader “slack” in the system, then determining how existing school leader resources can best be “spent” must be done with great care and with a close knowledge of the needs of schools and the families they serve. Such close knowledge can never be the strong suit of central provincial authorities, no matter how well intentioned and sophisticated. It is no small challenge even for those in district offices, so ceding autonomy cannot end at the district office either. Many principals and vice-principals in this study spoke about more autonomy in their schools as a means of enhancing the impact of their school improvement efforts while also making their workload more manageable.

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Ceding much more autonomy to districts (and districts to schools) might be viewed by some as risking the much-publicized advances in student performance (“good to great”) made in the province over the past decade. While EQAO evidence does point to some advances, results of the three major international testing programs (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA) since 2001 actually indicate no significant advances, at least in comparison with those other developed countries participating in these testing programs\textsuperscript{60}. The province, it would seem, has little to lose by awarding more autonomy to its districts and schools. In the process, it may create the conditions needed to make more efficient use of its existing leadership talent and to bring the workload demands on school leaders back to something that would make school leadership a more desirable career path for many more teachers than is presently the case.

6. **What strategies do principals and vice-principals use for coping with workload?**

This question was raised only with principals and vice-principals as part of the interviews and through the surveys. Results pointed to a handful of strategies favored by many, but with no runaway favorite. Many respondents aimed at maintaining a suitable work-life balance, and carving out time to spend with family – also a key consideration, other evidence suggests, affecting the aspirations of teachers for the principalship\textsuperscript{61}.

Many respondents also had adopted health-related strategies such as a regular fitness program of some type. Respondents spoke about the usefulness of establishing and “sticking with” priorities for their work in schools along with developing efficient ways of responding to urgent but predictable issues. Participating in a network of other school administrators provided a ready source of advice and support for many principals and vice-principals. These coping strategies encompass four sets of principal coping strategies found in some earlier research\textsuperscript{62}.

Although not mentioned in response to this question about coping strategies directly, responses of principals and vice-principals in the current study to other questions suggests that they also use the other strategies found in some earlier research. These other strategies include adopting positive attitudes toward their work, occasionally withdrawing from the work in order to “recharge”, setting realistic goals for their work and attempting to manage their time as efficiently as possible.

\textsuperscript{60} Leithwood (2012)  
\textsuperscript{61} For example, Cranston (2007)  
\textsuperscript{62} See, for example, Allison (1997)
7. How does workload influence principal and vice-principal responses to personal illness?

An overwhelming proportion of principals and vice-principals said that their workload was sufficiently demanding that they came to school in spite of signs of personal illness that might have recommended staying at home. Their work would pile up if they were not there, no one else would do it in their absence, and they did not want to face the backlog that would accumulate if they took time out to recover at home.

8. Does principal and vice-principal workload have a significant influence on recruiting teachers for school administrative roles?

An overwhelming proportion of principals and vice-principals believed that most of their teachers were discouraged from considering a future role as a school administrator by the amount and nature of the work in which they observed their principals and vice-principals engaged. From their teachers’ perspectives, the additional compensation was far too little, the demands and stresses too great, and the commitment of time far in excess of what was required of them as teachers.

These results echo much of the existing research on this issue. For example, Cranston’s (2007) study of potential principalship aspirants recommended that:

*The power of such [workload] factors as barriers for potential aspirants looking to the principalship emerges from this research as so significant that it must be a matter of serious debate among system-level decision makers, and not dismissed as simply a fact of life today for leaders of busy organizations, as it not only impacts negatively on those aspiring to higher level leadership positions (such as principals) but also impacts negatively on those already in such positions.*

Directors’ views on the recruitment question were mixed, although clearly trending closer to the views of principals and vice-principals. Several directors believed that their systems’ succession planning, leadership training, mentorships and general support and encouragement were significant, positive, influences on teachers’ decisions. The majority, however, cited the same reasons as their principals and vice-principals for teachers being reluctant to consider school administration, and suggested a handful of initiatives that might make the roles more palatable for teachers.
9. How can the work of principals and vice-principals be made more satisfying and productive?

Only the survey asked respondents this question, and almost all respondents put changes to Regulation 274, and some features of teacher collective agreements at the top of their lists. Other changes rated as especially important included increases in mental health resources, vice-principals, autonomy, support staff, and policies and procedures for responding to aggressive parents. Four additional suggestions entailed a reduction in the number of vice-principals with teaching responsibilities, the time and effort required for the appraisal of teaching and non-teaching staff, and public attention to EQAO results.

10. What factors should be considered when implementing a new provincial or board initiative?

Principals and vice-principals, faced with requests to implement new initiatives from the province or their districts, weighed a small handful of issues in deciding how best to respond. The number of initiatives already underway in their school, the extent of their implementation and the availability of resources needed to adequately implement the new initiative were among those issues, as was the match between the newly proposed initiatives and the schools’ improvement goals and priorities.

These administrators also considered the likelihood of eliminating some existing tasks to create the time required to implement, manage, and ensure the new initiative would be sustained. Time, they knew, would be required to fully engage and to build the understanding of staff whose work would be changed in some fashion by the new initiative. The decisions of significant numbers of principals and vice-principals were also influenced by the justification, rationale and/or motivation giving rise to the new initiative.

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63 Many, although not all of these suggestions are about the provision of more resources. As some members of the project advisory committee noted, however, it seems highly unlikely that districts will be given a significant infusion of new resources. So acting on these resource-dependent initiatives for making principal and vice-principal work more satisfying and productive entails rebalancing the distribution of existing resources. Some of this rebalancing could easily become a significant focus of union bargaining efforts.
Conclusion

Conventional wisdom and considerable empirical evidence suggests that school leaders, especially those in principal and vice principal positions, account for an important proportion of the variation in student achievement across schools.

The research indicates that the way to improve schools on a large scale is through highly motivated leaders, willing to hone their leadership craft over time, provided with useful opportunities to do such honing, placed in contexts that build on their talents and working in concert with other committed colleagues can usually achieve impressive results with their students. This is about the importance of what is referred to in the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) as Developing the Organization (or organizational re-design) and “person-environment fit”, as well as the capacity for significant learning by people who hold high expectations for themselves and their colleagues.

The results of this study make important contributions to the path to school improvement by demonstrating the range of challenges facing many school leaders, the contexts that make it especially difficult (or relatively easy) to improve their schools, and the underlying dimensions of principals’ and vice-principals’ sense making about their workload. These results are a direct complement to the *Ontario Leadership Framework* – the other side of the leadership “coin”. While the OLF describes the practices and personal leadership resources needed to improve a school’s performance, the results of this study provide a detailed understanding of why leaders with many of the same capacities are able to make very different contributions to their students’ achievement and well-being. These results provide guidance, especially to those responsible for designing the environments in which principals and vice-principals work, as well as to those who determine “who goes where”.
References


Leithwood, K. (2013). Principal and vice-principal workload study research design (October).


