

# **CUPE-SCFP**

# CUPE/OSBCU Submission: 2022 Round of Collective Bargaining Term of Operation "Consultation"

July, 2022

The Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE-OSBCU) is the bargaining agent in central bargaining for all CUPE school board locals in Ontario. We are education workers in virtually every job classification (excluding teachers and management positions) at 63 school boards and one school authority. We work in all four publicly funded education systems, English and French, Public and Catholic. We also engage actively in our communities. We are parents whose children are enrolled in the publicly funded education system. Our lives are deeply affected by collective bargaining outcomes, by education policy and the quality of education. We have an interest in maintaining high quality public services and in the quality of life in our communities.

Almost 3/4 of us are women. More than 2/3 are laid off over the summer. CUPE education workers earn an average of \$39,000 per year. We work an average of 92.4 minutes of unpaid work per week (almost two full weeks of unpaid work in a 43-week school year). We are overworked because of understaffing, and we regularly face layoffs when school boards choose to cut jobs even though staff are still required to provide supports to students. While you might want to characterize us as some abstract institution called "the union", we are actually over 55,000 people who are committed to supporting students, and whose lives matter. Collective bargaining is a serious process for our members. It is a matter of being able to put food on the table for our families. It is a matter of being able to stay in the jobs we love, supporting the students we care for. It affects every aspect of our lives.

This is why we have been insistent on starting collective bargaining early. We want to get results for the most vulnerable employees in the education system, to make our lives better. And we also want to bargain on issues that will make education better for students and parents.

CUPE Education workers are asking the Minister to stop delaying and get to the bargaining table to negotiate the improvements that education workers and students deserve. The Minister had the ability to start bargaining as early as March 2022 and chose not to. He had the opportunity to start bargaining in June but chose not to. Instead, we are being asked to "consult" as a tactic to further delay bargaining. The letter inviting us to make a submission to this "consultation" states: "As we look to start collective bargaining, now is an important opportunity to work together to provide parents, guardians and students with a stable in-class learning environment. Parents and students deserve a school year that starts on-time this coming September, so that young learners can catch up without any disruptions." – if that truly is the honest goal of the Ministry, then why have there been so many delays?

On the face of it, this consultation appears to be a sham. The Minister already articulated a preference for a 4-year term, making this look like a political ploy to push the next round of school board bargaining past the next provincial election. Doing so will actually make bargaining even more difficult because the government will almost certainly not issue regulation allowing early notice to bargain in an election year (in 2026 much like this year). Because of that, bargaining will not start until June at the earliest. And if this year is any indication, the government will seek to further delay bargaining into July/August, making it even more difficult to get a settlement prior to the beginning of the school year. CUPE-OSBCU has been completely committed to starting negotiations early, but this government is intent on making it impossible to achieve negotiated settlements prior to September this year, and potentially in the next round of bargaining. Actions by the government are clearly based on political calculation – the desire to avoid negotiating with school board workers during an election year.

CUPE-OSBCU wants to come to the table to talk about serious issues. Appended to his submission are documents outlining the kinds of things we want to discuss. Appendix 1 is a copy of the letter to the premier signed by well over 25,000 members, demanding that the government address wages and

staffing issues. Appendix 2 is a copy of our report on education workers wages, clearly demonstrating that the public policy of wage suppression for education workers - taken by the past Liberal and Conservative governments - has caused significant harm to our members. Appendix 3 is a copy of our annual submission on education funding indicating the kinds of investments in staffing that are needed to improve the education system for students and workers alike. Appendix 4 is a study on violence in the workplace that needs to be addressed for the benefit of workers and students. These are the substantial issues that need to be discussed. Any discussion about the term of the collective agreement should be done at the bargaining table and should be freely negotiated between the Parties. The term should be one part of a total package that includes all the substantive issues that we will be brining to the table.

The invitation to participate in this "consultation" includes three questions that are directed at employee bargaining agents. We will provide responses to each of these questions.

## Q: For employee bargaining agencies, whether a different term would advantageously or adversely affect the interests of employees:

CUPE-OSBCU prefers a shorter term for collective agreements as they are better for members and allow us to continuously negotiate for improvements that students need. A longer term locks the Parties in to terms and conditions of employment and denies members the ability to remedy concerns/problems with the collective agreement expeditiously. Longer term can adversely affect members' ability to address, through collective bargaining, emerging political and economic conditions. For example, locking in for a long period can deny members the ability to negotiate for wage improvements that deal with inflation as it is happening, making it necessary to play catch up in later rounds. Or if a bargaining settlement reflects a sharp economic downturn at a point in time, a longer term could lock members into a sub-optimal settlement for longer than is necessary. Shorter term agreements give the members of the union greater opportunity to address issues as they happen.

A decade of underfunding of public education has led to a situation in which not enough students have the appropriate staffing levels to thrive in safe and supportive schools. Fixing this requires a renewed and regular commitment to negotiations. It requires a commitment to talking through the issues and a real, sustained commitment to improve public education, including taking action to ensure that both workers and students have the supports they need.

The invitation to make this submission states: "We have observed that, in both rounds of full collective bargaining since the enactment of the Act, the combined duration of central and local bargaining has meant that many bargaining units do not have collective agreements in effect until much of the term of operation has elapsed. As a result, there is diminished opportunity for employees and employers alike to realize the benefits of the newly concluded collective agreements." This conclusion is based on a faulty premise. Where the union negotiates for improvements to collective agreements, those improvements do not expire at the end of the term of the agreements. They last for as long as they remain in the collective agreements. CUPE has a policy against concession bargaining and has every intention of maintaining every improvement we have ever negotiated. If the Ministry shares the goal of ensuring that members have a career-long access to all negotiated improvements the appropriate way to reach that goal is through free collective bargaining without making concessionary demands.

Furthermore, it is possible to extend the length of time that members and locals have access to newly negotiated terms. The government can amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act (SCBCA) so

that central agreements take effect immediately upon ratification of the central terms, without the requirement that a local collective agreement is ratified to access the centrally negotiated settlement.

Members have an interest in maintaining full and robust access to free collective bargaining. The length of the collective agreement should be negotiated between the Parties, as part of a total package of negotiated items. Three-year agreements have been the norm in the school board sector and have been generally acceptable to the Parties to date. The SBCBA is more restrictive than it needs to be in prescribing a 3-year term. Our position is that this should be removed from the Act. But if it is going to be there as a default, it should be up to the Parties to reach agreement on any change from that default position.

### Q: For all bargaining agencies, whether a different term would advantageously or adversely affect the process of collective bargaining;

Term should be subject to negotiations. The SCBCA needs to be amended to reflect this. Term is part of a total package of items that the parties agree to. Where one party wants a longer term, they are required to find terms of settlement that will make that longer term appealing to the other party. Conversely, if one party wants a shorter term, they would, under conditions of free collective bargaining, modify their bottom line to entice the other side into agreeing to the shorter term. Taking term out of collective bargaining makes it difficult to make those kinds of trade-offs that allow for both sides to reach a settlement that is acceptable.

# Q: For all bargaining agencies, whether a different term would advantageously or adversely affect student and public interest.

Always having bargaining in an election year, commencing after an election, will always delay the start of bargaining (because governments are averse to school board collective bargaining during election campaigns). Because bargaining starts later, and the government finds myriad ways to delay the process unnecessarily, it is almost inevitable that bargaining will spill over into the school year. However, if a government were to issue the regulation to allow early notice to bargain (the full 180 days prior to the expiry of the CAs), it would be much more possible to conclude negotiations prior to the expiry of the agreements. This Minister, however, seems committed to dragging everything out into the school year for political purposes.

A two- or three-year term for the upcoming collective agreement would allow for the next round of bargaining to happen well in advance of an election campaign, would be much more likely to result in the Minister issuing the regulation permitting early notice to bargain, and is much more likely to result in settlements prior to the expiry of the collective agreement. But, of course, that would require that the Ministry and CTA were also committed to reaching a settlement within that timeframe.

#### **Conclusion:**

The term of the next collective agreement should not be dictated through regulation. It should be freely negotiated between the Parties. The union has a preference for a shorter term for the collective agreement. Under limited circumstances a longer term might be acceptable if it were freely negotiated conditional on the entire package of settled items, and were there to be a net benefit to members and students.

DC:kw/cope491



#### A Letter to the Next Premier of Ontario:

I am an education worker in Ontario's publicly funded education system. The supports and services we provide are the learning conditions for students across Ontario.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have worked both in schools and off-site, at times risking our own and our families' health and safety. We took these risks so that students could keep learning and schools kept secure, and so that families and communities had the support they needed.

Education workers are critical to providing the public services that must be part of an equitable pandemic recovery plan for children and families across Ontario. But after more than two years of a pandemic and multiple school shutdowns, we are exhausted, and our numbers are depleted – just when students and their families need us most.

Even before the pandemic, understaffing among education workers was a problem in Ontario schools. Many school boards can't recruit and retain qualified education workers, in large part because wages are so low and jobs so precarious.

Over the past decade, a series of below-inflation wage increases has effectively cut the wages of education workers by more than 10%. A 2021 survey of CUPE education workers found 51% worked at least one additional job to make ends meet. This number increases to 64.5% for sole-income earners. Roughly 75% of our members are women for whom the gender pay gap is widening further each year. This has led to a staffing crisis – one that is only getting worse as education workers get sick with COVID.

It doesn't have to be this way. You can take action to fix this crisis by giving students the supports and services they need to recover and to thrive in their school communities.

We are calling on you to repeal wage restraint legislation and commit the funding necessary for public education in Ontario including:

- Real wage increases above the rate of inflation to address wage inequality and the recruitment and retention of education workers.
- Increased staffing to ensure that <u>all</u> students, especially students with special needs, have the support they need at school.

Signed,		
Signature	Print Name	Job Title

I authorize my signature to be added to an open letter to the next Premier of Ontario once a majority of my co-workers sign this letter. :kw/cope491

# Education Workers' Wages in Ontario: The Impact of Ten Years of Cuts





#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

CUPE education workers earn an average of just over \$39,000 per year. A decade of legislatively imposed wage restrictions and harsh bargaining positions taken by the government and school board trustees have meant that education workers' wages have not kept up with inflation and have fallen below the trends set for private sector unions and other public sector unions. Over the past 10 years increases to education workers' wages have been 8.8% while inflation in Ontario has been at least 19%.

Education workers' wages are no longer sufficient, on their own, to support a household. According to a survey of CUPE members, 51.4% of school board workers have had to take at least one additional job to make ends meet. The members most in need of additional jobs are sole income earners for their households, 64.5% of whom work at least one extra job (approximately 1/3 of CUPE education workers are the sole income earner in their household).

In addition to falling behind inflation, Ontario education workers' wages have fallen behind every other unionized sector in the province. Private sector wage settlements have averaged 20.3% (compounded) over the past decade, municipal unions have averaged 19.1%, unions in federally regulated workplaces have averaged 18.6% increase, and the Ontario Broader Public Sector (BPS) has averaged 12.2%.

Wage restraint has exacerbated the gender wage gap in Ontario. Women made up more than ¾ of respondents to a recent survey on wages of CUPE education workers. Women in the education sector are more likely to have their annual income limited by 10-months of employment (who are laid off for summers, and often December and March breaks as well). Restrictions on wage increases hit women particularly hard.

Over the past decade, wage increases that have trailed inflation have resulted in almost \$1.3 billion in cost savings just from CUPE members' incomes. In-year savings for 2021 are almost \$225 million. CUPE annual income would be \$4085 higher in 2021 if this money had been allocated equally to 55,000 members. Over time this wage gap has had profound negative effects on education workers' financial and personal wellbeing. But the issues have extended to school boards themselves who are facing significant recruitment and retention problems related to uncompetitive wages.

Education workers deserve a raise, as do all workers. It is long past time that we do something to change the existing trends towards stagnating wages and growing income inequality. There is nothing inevitable about the current state of affairs. But it will take political will, and political action, to make things better for workers.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

CUPE education workers play a vital role in the life of schools, doing work that is necessary to providing students with a high quality publicly funded, publicly delivered education. CUPE members hold virtually every kind of job in schools and school board offices (except for teacher and management positions). CUPE members are Educational Assistants who provide supports to students with special education needs, Early Childhood Educators who are part of the kindergarten education team, Custodians and Maintenance staff who keep schools clean, safe and in a state of good repair. They are School office staff who make sure schools run effectively and library workers who help students develop learning skills and a love of books that last a lifetime. CUPE education workers are language and music instructors, and professional staff who enhance learning and provide supports to some of the most vulnerable students. In short, schools would not be able to function without CUPE education workers, who make for a safe, clean, fully supported education system.

Despite how important they are to students' success and the success of schools as a whole; education workers do not get the recognition they deserve. They have been subject to longstanding understaffing and overwork, as well as legislative attacks on their wages. As a result of the latter, school board workers' wages have eroded significantly over the past decade. Legislative restrictions on free collective bargaining like Bill 115 (under the previous Liberal government) that froze wages for two years, and Bill 124 (under the current Conservative government) that limited increases to 1% per year for three years, contributed to long-term loss of real income. Overall, education workers' wages have increased by only 8.8% (compounded) from 2012 to 2022. Over that same period of time inflation in Ontario has been 19%.¹ Recently, the provincial government projected inflation in 2021 is topping 3%.² Reports in November 2021 show inflation as high as 4.7%.³ The imposition of 1% limit on wage increases through Bill 124 further eroded their purchasing power.

Inflation was calculated using Ontario budget data (various years) and the November 2021 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review to find an Ontario specific inflation rate. Where different inflation rates were recorded in budgets of different years, the data from the most recent budget was used. This is a relatively conservative estimate of inflation. Using inflation figures reported by Statistics Canada in November 2021, total inflation for the decade would be almost 21%. Wage increases were based on CUPE negotiated settlements for collective agreements from 2012 to 2022. Because of pattern bargaining in the education sector, all unions representing workers in school boards have the same wage increases.

The November 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review estimates inflation for 2021 at 3.1%, and projects it will be 2.6% in 2022.

See, for example, Jordan Press, "Annual inflation rate rises to 4.7% in October, Statistics Canada says", Toronto Star, November 17, 2021, https://www.thestar.com/business/2021/11/17/statistics-canada-to-detail-october-inflation-rate-as-pace-of-price-growth-rises.html.

"Affordability has become nearly impossible to manage. Every expenditure has increased substantially (food, gas, clothing, insurance, utilities, and taxes) but our wages have stagnated. This is not sustainable"

#### **Technician**

"We are an invaluable asset and the classroom could not run without us. Our pay does not reflect this in any way."

#### **Designated Early Childhood Educator**

"Struggle to pay rent. Rent prices have doubled in the last ten years. My 2-bedroom apartment costs \$2300 dollars a month. Food has gone up. Home prices have gone up. Car prices have gone up. Gas prices have gone up. Our wages have not gone up to compensate for this."

#### Maintenance/Trades

WE ARE the Front Line workers to make sure your kids have a safe and virus free educational environment."

#### Custodian/Caretaker/Cleaner

"We work really hard to support the special needs community. Every year they add more and more work loads onto us without any wage increases."

#### **Educational Assistant**

"We work hard and don't get the credit we deserve; we are running around trying to help multiple students in multiple classrooms with many different needs, we pay out of pocket for resources and work on building education resources on our own time."

#### Professional/Paraprofessional

"We are over worked and not compensated they know we will still do the work because we care about customer service."

#### Secretarial/Clerical

"I love my job but it saddens me that I can not support my family with my current income."

#### **Educational Assistant**

#### What Do CUPE Education Workers Earn?

When CUPE/OSBCU went to the bargaining table in 2019 our members' average annual wage was \$38,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> Three years later, after wage increases of just 1% per year the average wage is just over \$39,000 per year.<sup>5</sup>

In a recent survey of CUPE education workers, 84.2% of respondents indicated that they earn less than \$50,000 per year from their school board jobs and 96.6% indicated that they earn less than \$60,000 per year as education workers. Survey responses show that 33% of CUPE education workers are sole-income earners for their household.<sup>6</sup>

Over 51% of respondents said that they work at least one other job during the year to make ends meet. The proportion of education workers working additional jobs increases as income from the school board decreases. However, the most significant factor leading members to take a second (or third) job was single-income earner status: 64.5% of education workers who are the sole income earner for their household have to work at least one additional job in order to make ends meet. This suggests that, for the majority of education workers, school board employment is simply not enough to support a household.

No matter how you look at it, CUPE education workers do not fit any reasonable definition of high-income earner. Yet CUPE members have repeatedly been caught in legislative restrictions on their wages.

A decade of wage restraint has had a profound impact on education workers and has caused problems for school boards as well. Ten years of declining real wages for education workers, the overwhelming majority of whom earn less than \$50,000 per year, has resulted in pervasive forms of economic precarity, and stress and anxiety about finances. But artificially lowered wages have led to problems of recruitment and retention at school boards leading to staffing shortages. All told, government strategies of attacking the real wages of education workers have been a policy failure and have done substantial harm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This average includes 10-month and 12-month employees, full-time, part-time, and casual employees, and includes members in a wide range of wage rates.

<sup>5</sup> The total annual wages for all CUPE Education workers equal about \$2.16 billion, spread over a total membership of 55,000.

<sup>6</sup> CUPE education workers' wages survey, conducted September 27 to October 18, 2021. 89.5% of respondents to the survey indicated that they were full-time employees (in either permanent or temporary full-time positions).

# PART ONE – EDUCATION WORKER WAGES AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Education workers' wages have fallen behind all relevant economic indicators. Four years of wage freezes in each year from 2012-15 and a legislated limit of 1% increases for 2019-22 have meant that education workers' wages have not kept up with inflation over the past decade. Compounded wage improvements have only added up to an 8.8% increase since 2012 (an average of less than 1% increase per year), but compounded inflation has been 19.0% for the same period. In only 1 year has inflation been less than 1% - 2020, the first year of a global pandemic that also saw a major economic recession. Essentially, in real terms education workers have faced a 10.2% wage cut over ten years.

Education workers' wages have also fallen behind economic growth. While this measure does not indicate how much wages have eroded over time, this measure does show that education workers have not shared in the benefits ten years of growth (even if that growth has been slower than in previous eras of economic activity). If workers' wages had increased by Real GDP growth (that is, economic growth factoring for inflation), wages would have increased by 18.3% in that ten-year period. Again, this compares to the 8.8% in compounded wage increases for education workers.

This is merely to illustrate that workers' wages are going down relative to economic indicators. Government revenues are related to Nominal GDP growth. All other things being equal, economic growth means more money in government coffers. It is not that as a society we cannot afford to raise workers' wages. Instead, it was political choices by successive governments that did this.



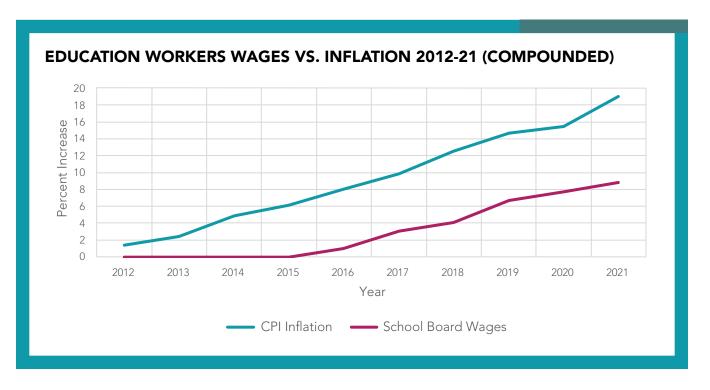
### EDUCATION WORKER WAGES COMPARED TO ECONOMIC INDICATORS: PERCENT INCREASES 2012-2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Real GDP	1.7	1.3	2.7	2.9	2.3	2.8	2.2	2.1	-5.7	4.0
Nominal GDP	3.2	1.9	4.7	5.0	4.4	4.1	3.4	3.8	-4.8	6.2
CPI Inflation	1.4	1.0	2.4	1.2	1.8	1.7	2.4	1.9	0.7	3.1
Education Worker Wages	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.5	1.0	1.0

Education worker wages in this chart appear larger than normal in 2017 and 2019. This is because wage increases in these years were covered by 2 collective agreements. The 2014-17 agreement included a 0.5% increase in February of 2017 and the first year of the 2017-19 extension agreement included an increase of 1.5% on September 1<sup>st</sup> of that year. The 2017-19 extension agreement included a 1% increase on February 1<sup>st</sup> of 2019 and another 0.5% increase on August 31<sup>st</sup> of that year. The 2019-22 collective agreement included an increase of 1% in the first year of the agreement, which took effect on September 1, 2019. To compare wage increases to other economic indicators these separate wage increases were aggregated into the annual rate and treated as if they applied for the entire year.

# **EDUCATION WORKER WAGE INCREASES BY COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT, 2012-2022**

0%	2012
0%	2013
0%	2014
0%	2015
1%	September 1, 2016
0.50%	February 1, 2017
1.50%	September 1, 2017
1%	September 1, 2018
1%	February 1, 2019
0.50%	August 30, 2019
1%	September 1, 2019
1%	September 1, 2020
1%	September 1, 2021

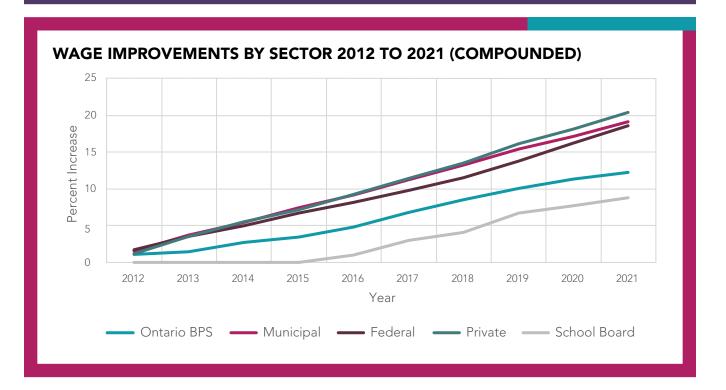


Education workers' wages have also fallen behind the average settlements for every other unionized sector in Ontario. Compounded wage improvements for the private sector amount to 20.3% from 2012 to 2021 (slightly more than inflation) while settlements in the Ontario Broader Public Sector (BPS) have totaled a mere 12.2% (substantially below inflation) and the school board sector has seen only 8.8% improvements.

The municipal sector (which includes police and fire) has averaged approximately 19.1% wage increase for the past decade (roughly equivalent to total inflation for that period) and unions in federally regulated workplaces have averaged wage settlements that total 18.6% (slightly below total inflation for this period). All told, the education sector has had the lowest average settlements of any unionized sector in Ontario – and, at best, other sectors are trending towards wage settlements that roughly cover the costs of inflation.

## COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT SETTLEMENTS BY SECTOR: PERCENT WAGE INCREASES 2012 TO 20217

Sector	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Private	1.2	2.3	1.9	1.6	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.3	2.0	1.9
Federal	1.7	1.8	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.6	2.0	2.1	2.1
Municipal	1.5	2.2	1.6	1.9	1.6	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.5	1.7
Ontario BPS	1.1	0.3	1.3	0.7	1.3	1.9	1.6	1.4	1.2	0.8
OSBCU	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.5	1.0	1.0



#### The Cost of Wage Restraint

A decade of wage restraint, keeping wage improvements below inflation, has taken a total of almost \$1.3 billion out of the pockets of CUPE education workers. According to the Financial Accountability Office, wages for all staff and administration account for roughly 78% of Grants for Student Needs

Ontario Ministry of Labour Collective Bargaining Highlights https://www.lrs.labour.gov.on.ca/VAViewer/ VisualAnalyticsViewer\_guest.jsp?reportName=Collective%20Bargaining%20Highlights&reportPath=/ Shared%20Data/SAS%20Visual%20Analytics/Public/LASR/ (accessed October 25, 2021).

(GSN) spending.<sup>8</sup> A large percentage of funding going to wages makes sense because education is a labour-intensive process. It takes people to perform the services that make students' education possible. Capital investments and investments in equipment cannot change that. Of the total school board wage bill, CUPE members' wages represent approximately 11% of the total cost.<sup>9</sup>

In 2012-13, the first year of Bill 115, the wage freeze cost CUPE members almost \$25.2 million. Total GSN spending was \$20.97 billion, meaning the total wage bill was approximately \$16.35 billion. CUPE members' wages accounted for 11% of that, or just under \$1.8 billion. Inflation was 1.4% that year – had CUPE members' wages increased by inflation the total CUPE wage bill would have been \$25.2 million higher.

The next year saw an inflation rate of 1.0%. But since CUPE education workers had their wages frozen again, the accumulated and compounded loss of wages due to inflation was 2.41%. Applying that to the total GSN (and to wages as a proportion of the GSN), shows that CUPE education workers lost \$42.9 million in wages in the year 2013-14. By 2021-22, the accumulated difference between inflation and CUPE education workers' wage increases was 10.23%. This results in a total in-year loss of \$224.6 million in wages. Adding all of the in-year deficits together results in a total of almost \$1.3 billion in savings the government has achieved on the backs of workers whose average annual wage is still just over \$39,000 per year – 96.6% of whom make less than \$60,000 per year. See the Appendix for the full calculation of each in-year difference between inflation and wage increases.

This is, of course, just an estimate of the in-year savings for the past decade (and the cumulative savings for the government due to a decade of wage restraint). The calculation is based on the assumption that total wages for the education sector are 78% of the total Grants for Student Needs (GSN) spending and total CUPE education worker wages are 11% of total wage costs. It is likely that these specific proportions change from year-to-year but remain close to these assumptions.

The GSN represents the majority of funding for school boards. In 2021 it was almost \$25.6 billion, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/2122/GSNProjection2021-22.pdf. Ontario Financial Accountability Office, Expenditure Estimates 2019-20: Ministry of Education, Fall 2019, https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/ Publications/expenditure-estimates-education-2019.

Otal GSN funding in 2020-21 was approximately \$25.03 billion. The total wage cost would have been approximately \$19.53 (assuming it is 78% of total GSN). The total CUPE wage bill for that period was approximately \$2.16 billion, or approximately 11% of the total wage bill.

The point of this exercise is, however, to show that significant sums of money have been withheld from education workers leading to falling real wages. Roughly \$1.3 billion has been saved from the wage bill over a decade, just for CUPE school board members. This translates into an average of \$22,500 in lost income for each of the 55,000 CUPE education workers in those 10 years. In 2021, assuming the government saved \$224,663,192 because CUPE members' wages did not keep up with inflation, education workers' annual wages are, on average, \$4,085 lower than they would be had they kept up with inflation.

#### **Gender Inequality**

According to Statistics Canada, in 2019 the average annual employment income for men in Ontario was \$56,200, whereas for women the average annual employment income was just \$39,900.10 Based on average annual income, women earn a mere 71% of what men make. Looking instead at median annual employment income shows that men earn \$44,200 compared to \$31,600 for women, resulting in only a slight difference. By this measure women make 71.5% of men's employment income.

It is striking to note that adjusted for inflation women's average annual income in Ontario declined from 2017 to 2019 (adjusted to 2019 dollars). In 2017 women's average income was \$40,800, in 2018 it was \$40,700, and in 2019 it dropped to \$39,000 in constant dollars.<sup>11</sup>

Education workers are predominantly women. In the most recent survey of CUPE members on their wages, 79.9% of respondents identified as female. Women are more likely to be in positions with a lower annual income than men. For example, 89.9% of women earn less than \$50,000 per year, compared to 60.9% of men. Responses to CUPE's survey on education workers' wages show that 98% of women earn less than \$60,000 per year compared to 91.1% of men.

In part (but only in part) the income disparity is because women are more likely to work positions that are only paid for 10 months of the year. Survey results show that 81.7% of women are paid for 10 months of the year while only 20.1% of men are employed in 10-month positions. Only 17.2% of

Statistics Canada, Distribution of employment income of individuals by sex and work activity, Canada, provinces, and selected census metropolitan areas: 2015 – 2019, March 23, 2021, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110024001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2015&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2019&reference Pariods=20150101%2C20190101

Statistics Canada, Distribution of employment income of individuals by sex and work activity, Canada, provinces, and selected census metropolitan areas: 2015 – 2019, March 23, 2021.

women are in 12-month positions compared to 79.1% of men. The remainder work something other than a 10-month or 12-month work-year (1.1% of women and 0.8% of men). Women are overrepresented in job classifications whose overall annual income is limited by a shortened work-year, reproducing features of the overall gender wage gap within school boards themselves.

The restriction of 10-months of employment (often coupled with layoffs over the December and March breaks) is an adverse working condition for work that needs to be done. The work these members do is necessary to schools functioning properly. Without Education Assistants, Designated Early Childhood Educators, school office staff, library workers, instructors and a myriad of other job classifications students would not have the supports they need to succeed. Schools would not have their administrative functions completed. Essentially, the entire system would flounder and fail. But the workers who fill these positions are penalized by receiving 2-months less pay per year, which is only worsened by wage restraint legislation and pattern bargaining that has resulted in wage trends that fall far behind inflation.

In a very real sense, the attack on education workers' wages has exacerbated the overall gender wage gap and has undermined any ostensible attempts to address the persistent gender wage gap across society as a whole. No strategy for ending gender wage inequality can ignore compensation for public sector employment, especially in sectors that are dominated by women such as education. This would include addressing wage rates, hours of work per week, and the limitations on the work year for this socially necessary, but sadly undervalued, work.



# PART TWO – MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES

In September and October 2021 CUPE surveyed school board members to find out what a decade of wage restraint has meant for them. The survey received 16,523 complete responses, or 30% of the total membership.<sup>13</sup> Permanent full-time employees made up 85.9% of respondents and 3.6% indicated they are full-time employees in a temporary contract. Permanent part-time employees represented 4.3% of respondents and temporary part-time employees represented 0.6% of respondents. 4.9% of respondents indicated they are employed as casual employees, and 0.7% indicated their employment status as "other".

10-month employees made up 69.6% of respondents, 29.4% indicated they are 12-month employees, and 1% have a different work year (either more or less than 10 months). Of the 10-month employees, 93.4% indicate that they apply for Employment Insurance during periods of layoff from the school board, including December and March breaks and summers.

The survey shows that 84.2% of respondents have an annual income less than \$50,000 per year from their school board job, and 96.6% have an annual school board income of less than \$60,000 per year.

Results indicate that 51.4% of respondents have taken at least one additional job outside of the school board to make ends meet. The proportion of members who take additional employment increases as school board income decreases. However, the most important factor leading to members taking a second (or third) job is whether they are a sole income earner for their household. Of the sole income earners, 64.5 % said they had to take additional employment to make ends meet. Educational Assistants are the job classification most likely to report having to take additional employment, 62.2% of whom work at least one job outside of the school board.

Members were given two groupings of questions to gauge the effects of wage restraint on them and their families. The first grouping of questions roughly correlates to financial difficulties, the second roughly correlates to personal impacts on members and their families, including quality of life issues.

<sup>13</sup> CUPE Education Workers' Wages Survey, conducted September 27 to October 18, 2021. Respondents were given the option to skip questions they did not want to answer. Most respondents answered all of the questions; however, a small percentage skipped some questions. When reporting the percentages of respondents for each question the total number of responses for that question is used (the total number of responses for each question is less than 16,523).

# SINCE 2012 EDUCATION WORKER WAGES INCREASED AT LESS THAN INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING. WHAT HAS THIS MEANT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

I struggle to afford childcare	2399	14.52%
My children cannot participate in extra curricular activities (e.g., sports, camps,	3502	21.19%
music lessons, etc.)		
I have to hold off on planned household spending (e.g., clothing, renovations, new	12192	73.79%
appliances, car repair, etc.)		
I am not be able to put money aside for my children's post-secondary education	6927	41.92%
I struggle to pay my monthly bills (including rent/mortgage, heat, car, student debt)	7740	46.84%
I struggle to be able to afford gas/public transit	4026	24.37%
I have to cut back on food	4485	27.14%
I have had to visit a food bank	634	3.84%
I have to stop putting money aside from savings and/or drain my savings account	11359	68.75%
Other (please specify)	1012	6.12%
None of the above	1439	8.71%

Over 91% of members indicated that they faced at least one of the financial difficulties included in the survey (or a self-identified "other" hardship that allowed members to provide comments. Only 8.7% of members indicated that they have not faced any of the listed problems. When reading the written comments for the survey it became clear that a significant number of members answered "none of the above" on this question because their spouse earned significantly more than they do. Often those members indicated that they would have certainly had financial difficulties had they not been married to someone with a good income.

75.2% of respondents said that they faced two or more of these financial difficulties, 59.8% indicated that they faced 3 or more of these problems, and 42.7% face 4 or more. This suggests that the impact of wage restraint is multifaceted and is felt deeply by members and their families. Among the most common ill-effects is the inability to save, including for children's post-secondary education, and/or the drawing down of existing savings, leaving members even more vulnerable to future financial difficulties.

The second group of questions relates primarily to personal effects of below-inflation wage increases over the past decade. Granted, some of these are also directly related to financial difficulties, such as housing insecurity. But these issues also deal explicitly with well-being and quality of life. Anxiety and stress about being able to afford everything they need is felt by over 76.4% of respondents and over 81.2% are worried that an unexpected event would cause economic hardship. More than 2/3 of respondents also indicate that they have cut back on entertainment or hobbies and have canceled (or avoided making) vacation plans.

Overall, 95.1% of respondents faced at least one of these adverse personal effects of wage increases that fell below inflation – 87.0% of respondents faced two or more of these effects, 80.1% faced three or more, and 71.2% experienced four or more. Once again, we see that the effects of declining real wages are felt deeply, adversely affect members' well-being and quality of life, and are multifaceted.

#### BECAUSE OF MY INCOME I HAVE (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

Felt stress or anxiety about being able to afford everything I need	12679	76.74%
Worried that an unexpected event would cause economic hardship for me and my	13428	81.27%
family		
Been late in making bill payments	6781	41.04%
Been unable to afford new essentials (e.g., cell phone, highspeed internet, data	7458	45.14%
plans, etc.)		
Had to borrow money from family and/or friends	5873	35.54%
Suffered from poor mental health	6740	40.79%
Faced housing insecurity or worried about where I would live	3439	20.81%
Used payday loans	1217	7.37%
Cut back entertainment and/or hobbies	11088	67.11%
Canceled vacation plans or avoided planning vacations	11172	67.61%
Other (please specify)	551	3.33%
None of the above	806	4.88%

CUPE education workers were also given the opportunity to provide written comments on their wages. When asked "do you have any other comments that would explain why CUPE education workers deserve better wages?" respondents provided 530 pages worth of comments, a small selection of which appear in this report.

Members provided great detail on what a decade of wage restraint has meant. Respondents reflected on housing insecurity and difficulties keeping up with rising rental prices, many saying that home ownership was out of their reach. It was not uncommon to hear of members' fear that they will have insufficient savings for retirement and that their pensions have taken a huge hit by such low wage increases. Other members discussed how living paycheque to paycheque adds to their stress and means they cannot afford vacations, hobbies, entertainment, or other things that add to the quality of life.

Education workers' take great pride in providing supports to students, love their jobs, and know how important their contributions are. However, many expressed that their own kids often have to do without because wages have fallen so far behind inflation. In some cases, members say their kids cannot enroll in sports or other activities. In other cases, they say that their kids who need additional supports (including educational supports) for their wellbeing do not get what they need. Members have said that they are having difficulty saving for their kids' post-secondary education, or their kids who are already enrolled in PSE have to take on substantial debt to be able to afford to attend university or college. The Financial Accountability Office report on income inequality speaks to the consequences of this: "When children in lower-income families have fewer opportunities and face grater challenges in acquiring skills and education, their future potential may go unrealized. This can lower their potential productivity and reduce future economic growth, which in turn lowers income gains and ultimately reinforces income inequality."14

"Being a single person, I will never be able to afford to buy a house. Sometimes I have to dip into retirement savings to make it through the summer. I am constantly worried about whether I'll have enough money saved for all 3 layoffs each school year. Will I actually be able to retire? If I have to leave a bill unpaid this month which one will it be? If my car breaks down unexpectedly will I be able to afford to fix it?"

Professional/Paraprofessional

"I am not able to replace my 10 year old vehicle that has 400,000km"

**Library Worker** 

Ontario Financial Accountability Office, Income Inequality in Ontario: Growth, Distribution, Mobility, Winter 2019, https://6485129990.saas.quicksilk.com/web/default/files/publications/Income%20Jan%202019/Income-report. FAO.pdf.

"I have to work two jobs to make enough money to survive. I have enough for food, savings etc but that is only with a second job."

#### Secretary/Clerical

"I have to go into debt in order to pay my bills. Especially during the summer holidays."

#### **Educational Assistant**

"All of my earnings go into bills, there is nothing left over at the end of the month, and I am pay cheque to pay cheque barely making ends meet."

#### **Educational Assistant**

"I am fortunate that I have a husband who makes better money because if I didn't, I would be checking off all of the above"

#### **Educational Assistant**

"As education workers we feel stressed everyday because we do not have enough time to get our work completed and to meet the needs of the schools/departments. No overtime is offered either. This overwhelming stress is then compacted by not bringing home a decent wage to support my family and my obligations. It really is deflating when you put your blood sweat and tears into a job that doesn't reward you mentally, just exhausts you. nor does it reward financially. I just make ends meet. I have considered getting a part-time job to help aid me with my expenses. But I am exhausted at the end of the day, I need to be there for my family. Thank you."

#### **Central Administration**

"Money has become a constant worry and source of stress for my wife and I. It affects/is part of the conversation almost all of our decisions.

Our children also see and feel this stress, and feel guilty about asking for money for things like sports, extracurricular or going out for the subway with their friends once in a while."

#### Other Classification

"I've had a second part-time job for many years."

#### **Library Worker**

# PART THREE – EFFECTS ON SCHOOL BOARDS

#### **Recruitment and Retention**

Wage restraint legislation has not only deeply affected CUPE education workers. School boards have also faced consequences. For example, school boards are facing serious recruitment and retention problems, in no small part due to uncompetitive wages. To be sure, some of the recent staffing shortages have been due to the global pandemic, as needs have increased, and boards were ill-equipped to increase staffing levels to meet the particular needs of the health emergency. However, the staffing problems that came into sharp focus were premised on existing staffing shortages, including short or non-existent lists of available casual and supply staff.

In a March 2021 survey of CUPE locals in the school board sector over 77% indicated that their school boards were experiencing recruitment and retention problems. Significantly, wages were identified by roughly 2/3 of those locals as one of the main contributing factors to problems with recruitment and retention.

In its annual report on the Ontario education system, People for Education reports that school principals have reported significant problems with maintaining staffing levels. "Principals reported that the demand for mental health and educational supports skyrocketed, but that there was no corresponding increase in human resources. They reported a shortage of social workers, school psychologists, child/youth counsellors, special education services, occasional teachers, educational assistants, and speech language pathologists." Although this was written in the context of the staffing shortages during the pandemic, the report echoes what CUPE locals have been saying for years – there is a serious recruitment and retention problem in the education sector.

Recent news reports also shed light on recruitment and retention problems. This was captured in a CBC report on Educational Assistants at the Thames Valley DSB. <sup>16</sup> The board has found it difficult to maintain a full list of casual EAs who cover staff on leave (including sick leave). The board's response

People for Education, Challenges and Innovations: 2020-21 Annual Report on Ontario Schools, October 7, 2021, 2020-21-AOSS-Final-Report-Published-110721.pdf (peopleforeducation.ca).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Kate Dubinsky, "Amid dire shortages of educational assistants Thames Valley school board looks to hire 200", CBC News, October 21, 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/amid-dire-shortage-of-educational-assistants-thames-valley-school-board-looks-to-hire-200-1.6214981

was to lower qualifications for these positions, a decision that undermines quality of education. The problem, of course, is not that qualified EAs are unavailable. Instead, it is that wages are too low to attract qualified EAs to work in casual and supply positions.

A similar report shows the Simcoe County DSB and Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB both face shortages of staff that included educational assistants, early childhood educators, office and clerical staff, and custodians. The same article states that other boards are facing staffing shortages, including the Durham DSB which is "considering closing schools on days when they don't have enough staff." A spokesperson for the Catholic board said, "staff shortages were a problem before COVID-19; the pandemic made it worse". Once again, this reinforces what CUPE locals have been saying.

"the amount of knowledge required for my job is significant. The investment in the employee needs to be greater, to maintain staffing."

#### Secretary/Clerical

"Giving CUPE employees better wages would mean less revolving door positions. I constantly consider going back to school or applying to other positions in an attempt to earn more money because as much as I love this job even at it's highest paying rank it is not enough for me to live comfortably."

Secretary/Clerical

"Currently wages are a big reason that casual employees can't be found."

#### **Educational Assistant**

"I am a trades person making 15 to 20 dollars an hour less than a tradesperson in the private sector. We (RDSB) are currently looking for tradespeople to work for the board and they aren't even getting applicants because the wages are too low. We need to compete with the higher wages (private sector) so we can have a full service maintenance department."

Custodian/Caretaker/Cleaner

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Sara Carson, "'Some of these people were excellent, excellent educators': Simcoe County school boards face staff shortage", Simcoe.com, November 16, 2021, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/10514455--some-ofthese-people-were-excellent-excellent-educators-simcoe-county-school-boards-face-staff-shortage/.

"CUPE education workers often work in environments that are short-staffed or have the bare minimum staffing. As such, we all have large amounts of work and our pay should reflect that. Additionally, staffing and workload issues aside, our wages are simply not keeping up with inflation."

Secretarial/Clerical

"Many of us make considerably less than the industry standard for our skills/trades."

Information Technology Staff

# CONCLUSION

Education workers in Ontario deserve a raise. Schools cannot work without the contributions they make on a daily basis yet their wages over the past 10 years have not kept up with inflation. Wages have fallen behind economic growth. School board workers' wages have also trailed behind negotiated settlements in all other unionized sectors in the province (private sector, municipalities, federally regulated workplaces, and the rest of the Ontario broader public sector). The most significant reason for this is misguided and punitive legislation that forced wage restraint on some of the lowest paid workers in schools.

This is not sustainable. It has caused real economic and personal hardships for education workers. It has exacerbated the overall gender wage gap in Ontario and has contributed to growing economic inequality. School boards themselves have also faced significant problems with recruitment and retention related to wages.

In the 2021 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review the Minister of Finance said "... for too long, the workers of our province have been taken for granted... Take-home pay for many workers has not kept up with rising costs" (emphasis added). He further stated "During the pandemic, the workers of Ontario had our back. And our government has theirs. We want Ontario workers in a race to the top, not a race to the bottom." <sup>18</sup> If the Minister is being honest, then it's time to put that sentiment into action and increase wages for Ontario's education workers.

Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2021 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Build Ontario, November 4, 2021, https://budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf

"We put in way more hours than we are paid for because we care about the children in our school lives. It's a slap in the face that we don't get paid a decent wage, get paid over the holidays and then have to wait so long for EI to kick in...."

#### **Designated Early Childhood Educator**

"CUPE education workers work hard and are significantly under paid. A person working full time should be able to independently support their family. It is demoralizing having to rely on others or to have to get a second job. I am a single mother and want my children to know if you work hard you will do ok in life."

#### **Educational Assistant**

"Everyone deserves a living wage at the least."

Secretary/Clerical



# APPENDIX: ESTIMATE OF THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SAVED DUE TO WAGE ADJUSTMENTS LOWER THAN INFLATION

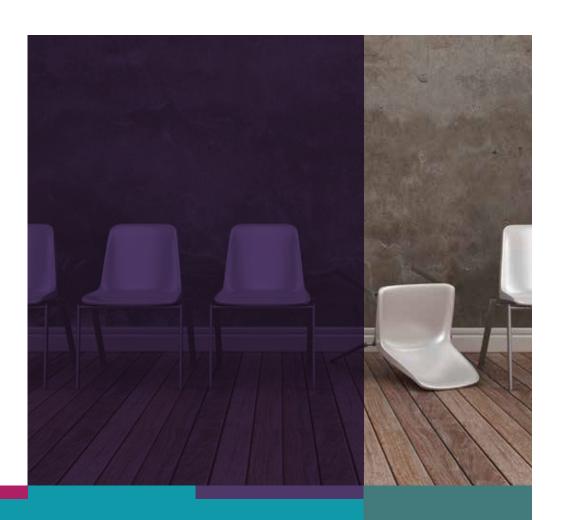
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total GSN	20,967,365,758	20,768,115,379	22,316,422,767	22,619,146,780	22,957,509,950	23,926,530,938	24,629,477,931	24,715,635,972	25,034,744,736	25,595,817,417
Total Wages	16,354,545,291	16,199,129,996	17,406,809,758	17,642,934,488	17,906,857,761	18,662,694,132	19,210,992,786	19,278,196,058	19,527,100,894	19,964,737,585
CUPE Wages	1,798,999,982	1,781,904,300	1,914,749,073	1,940,722,794	1,969,754,354	2,052,896,354	2,113,209,206	2,120,601,566	2,147,981,098	2,196,121,134
Gap*	1.4%	2.41%	4.87%	6.13%	7.04%	6.86%	8.46%	8.00%	7.73%	10.23%
Savings**	25,186,000	42,943,894	93,248,280	118,966,307	138,670,707	140,828,690	178,777,499	169,648,125	166,038,939	224,663,192

\* This is the cumulative gap between compounded inflation and wage settlements in the school board sector.

This is, of course, just an estimate of the in-year savings for the past decade (and the cumulative savings for the government due to a decade of wage restraint). Total wages for the education sector are based on the assumption that staffing costs represent 78% of the total Grants for Student Needs (GSN) spending. Total CUPE education worker wages are based on the assumption that CUPE's share of the total wage bill is 11%. It is likely that these specific proportions change from year-to-year but remain close to these assumptions. Changing the assumptions could result in any given year.

The point of this exercise is, however, to show that significant sums of money have been withheld from education workers leading to falling real wages. Roughly \$1.2 billion has been saved from the wage bill over a decade. This translates into a an average of \$22,500 in lost income for 55,000 CUPE Education workers in 10 years. In 2021, assuming the government saved \$221,808,235 because CUPE members' wages did not keep up with inflation, education workers' annual wages are, on average, \$4,033 lower than they should be.

<sup>\*\*</sup> This is the approximate savings to the government due to wage increases that lag behind inflation. Adding each of these in-year savings nets the government \$1,298,971,192 total savings.





# **CUPE-SCFP**

# CUPE/OSBCU Submission on Ministry of Education Funding Consultation for 2022-23

Submitted November 26, 2021

#### **Summary of Recommendations**

- 1. Substantial wage increases for all education workers.
- Extend all funding for jobs that were negotiated in the 2019-22 collective agreements (Investments in System Priorities, Education Worker Protection Fund, Community Use of Schools).
- 3. Increase real per-pupil funding to 2011-12 levels.
- 4. Tie funding to specific staffing levels by limiting employers' ability to use funds for purposes for which they were not generated.
- 5. Increase all benchmarks to fully reflect the costs of negotiated central agreements and the real inflation of non-compensation related costs.
- 6. Establish a provincial cleaning standard for schools, including the initial step of hiring an average of one additional permanent custodian per school.
- 7. Improve special education outcomes by hiring an average of one additional EA per school, with the goal of reducing student to EA ratios and targeting resources to students with the greatest needs.
- 8. Improve school administration by hiring an average of 0.5 FTE secretaries per school to address increased workloads due to additional duties being added to secretaries.
- 9. Double the number of library technicians employed in schools to enhance library services to students, improving their skills and outcomes.
- 10. Training for custodial staff to do preventative maintenance, including additional hours of work to do preventative maintenance.
- 11. Fund the hiring of additional maintenance workers to address the existing \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs. The province will also need to develop a plan for eliminating deferred maintenance needs to protect infrastructure and provide the highest possible quality spaces for students to learn.
- 12. Additional funding for student supervision. This will help enhance student safety and reduce workloads of other staff who can use this time to focus on the core duties of their occupations, focusing on student needs.
- 13. Additional funding to ensure all DECEs have a minimum of 35 hours per week for full-time jobs.
- 14. Ensure that there is one ECE in each Kindergarten class, including classes with fewer than 16 students.
- 15. Enhance funding for Community Use of Schools.
- 16. Increase IT Capacity at all School Boards, including additional IT staff.

#### Canadian Union of Public Employees/Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE/OSBCU)

The Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), the bargaining agent for 55,000 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) members who work in Ontario school boards, welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on Education Funding for the 2022-23 school year. CUPE/OSBCU members have a vast amount of experience in the education sector, working in virtually every job classification in Ontario schools, excluding teachers and managerial positions. These include early childhood educators, educational assistants, instructors, library staff, child and youth workers, other professionals and paraprofessionals, office and clerical staff, information technologists, custodial, maintenance and trades personnel. Our members' experience informs this submission. The submission is also informed by the needs of all parents and students, in fact all Ontarians, for a strong and sustainable publicly funded and publicly delivered education system.

#### <u>Introduction</u>

It will come as no surprise that CUPE/OSBCU is resubmitting recommendations that we have made in previous submissions on education funding. A decade of deepening austerity, applied to a funding formula that has been broken for more than a quarter-century, has deprived schools of the resources they need to function properly. And since education is a labour-intensive process, it is no surprise that systemic and structural underfunding has manifested as understaffing and low wages for education workers. Our recommendations aim to redress these systemic problems to meet student needs as well as create good jobs for education workers – twin goals that would benefit all communities across the province.

Our submission, as always, is based on the principles of:

- Providing the highest quality publicly funded, publicly administered education system possible.
- Guaranteeing all students have equitable access to the same high-quality publicly delivered education, and all resources necessary to succeed should be provided to all students.
- Affirming that publicly funded and publicly administered schools are important to the full
  development of communities across the province. Preserving schools, enhancing community
  use, and making schools community hubs will strengthen communities across the province

#### **Recommendations**

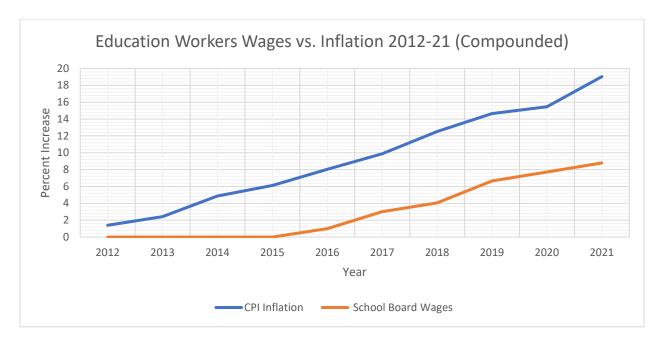
CUPE/OSBCU has several recommendations for how to improve the education system for students and workers alike. Our recommendations are guided by the principles outlined above.

#### 1. Substantial wage increases for all education workers

Education workers deserve a raise. The past decade has seen education workers' wages fall substantially below inflation. In no small part this is because of legislative interference with free collective bargaining that used the power of the state to limit wage improvements for the lowest paid employees in the education sector. Bill 115 under the previous Liberal government froze wages for two years, which was followed by a hard bargaining strategy on the part of the Crown and Council of Trustees Associations (CTA) that resulted in another pattern settlement that included two more years of wage freeze. Bill 124 under the current Progressive Conservative government imposed 1% increases per year for a three-year

collective agreement, even though all evidence pointed to the fact that this would be lower than inflation, and was lower than the trends for other unionized sectors of the economy.

The result of this punitive attack on education workers' wages has been wage settlements from 2012-2021 that equal 8.8% (compounded) while inflation for that same period has totaled 19.0%. This gap between wage increases and inflation has been imposed on workers who are necessary to the proper functioning of the education system, who provide vital direct and indirect services to students, so students' schools work for them. Wage restraint has been imposed on workers, 84.2% of whom earn less than \$50,000 a year, and 96.6% earn less than \$60,000 per year.



For the same period that education workers have fallen behind inflation, other unionized sectors of the economy, where legislative coercion has not been used as directly to limit wage improvements, have fared better. From 2012-2021³ private sector wage gains have averaged 20.4% (slightly more than inflation), municipal wage settlements have averaged 19.1% (roughly the rate of inflation), and federally regulated workplaces have averaged 18.6% (slightly below inflation). The broader public sector, which has been the subject of legislative restrictions on free collective bargaining and hard demands from employers for wage restraint has averaged 12.2% increases (substantially below inflation).

Public sector workers have not been seeing wage increases that are greater than the private sector. They are not seeing wage increases that are higher than any other unionized sector in Ontario. In fact, public sector workers in Ontario have taken the brunt of austerity measures and have seen wage increases that fall far below inflation. This must change.

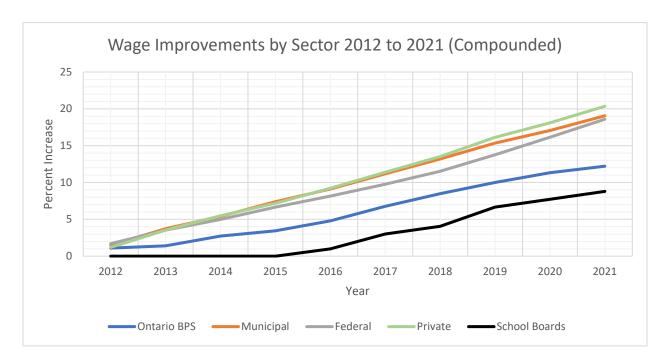
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Inflation rates from Government of Ontario budgets (various years) and the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review (November 4, 2021) were used to calculate the cumulative inflation rate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Taken from a survey of CUPE education workers September/October 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Wage improvement data retrieved from Ministry of Labour Collective Bargaining Reports (various years) <a href="https://www.lrs.labour.gov.on.ca/VAViewer/VisualAnalyticsViewer guest.jsp?reportName=Collective%20Bargaining%20Highlights&reportPath=/Shared%20Data/SAS%20Visual%20Analytics/Public/LASR/">https://www.lrs.labour.gov.on.ca/VAViewer/VisualAnalyticsViewer guest.jsp?reportName=Collective%20Bargaining%20Highlights&reportPath=/Shared%20Data/SAS%20Visual%20Analytics/Public/LASR/</a>

In the 2021 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review the Minister of Finance said "... for too long, the workers of our province have been taken for granted. Under previous governments, well-paying manufacturing jobs left our province in droves. Take-home pay for many workers has not kept up with rising costs" (emphasis added). He further stated "During the pandemic, the workers of Ontario had our back. And our government has theirs. We want Ontario workers in a race to the top, not a race to the bottom."

That sentiment must be applied to education worker bargaining in 2022 and this government must properly budget to improve the wages of education workers in our next collective agreement. Education workers kept schools operating throughout the pandemic, often as the only workers in schools, keeping them safe and clean, and providing supports to students who were still attending in-person because they were unable to make the transition to online learning. CUPE members did, as the Minister says, have the backs of every student in this province.



Furthermore, wage restraint over the past decade has led to significant recruitment and retention problems at school boards. Over 77% of CUPE school board locals indicated that their board is having problems with recruitment and retention. Approximately 2/3 of those locals said that wage issues were the primary cause of this problem. Faceently the CBC reported that the Thames Valley DSB was having difficulties maintaining a sufficient number of supply Educational Assistants. In the absence of the ability to increase wages to attract qualified applicants, the board appears to have decided to cut the required qualifications. Lowering qualifications is an unacceptable solution. It is unfair to students and workers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2021 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Build Ontario, November 4, 2021, <a href="https://budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf">https://budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Taken from a survey of CUPE school board locals in March 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Kate Dubinski, "Amid dire shortages of educational assistants Thames Valley school board looks to hire 200", CBC News, London ON, October 21, 20221, <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/amid-dire-shortage-of-educational-assistants-thames-valley-school-board-looks-to-hire-200-1.6214981">https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/amid-dire-shortage-of-educational-assistants-thames-valley-school-board-looks-to-hire-200-1.6214981</a>

alike. The source of the problem, wages that have been artificially lowered by regressive legislation, is what needs to be corrected.

The government will also need to properly fund for increasing costs to benefit plans. The costs of benefits have increased substantially over the past three years, significantly more than the negotiated increases in funding. In the 2020 annual report to the parties to the CUPE EWBT Trust Agreement the costs of sustaining the existing benefits plan were projected to be 7% per year. Funding at this level is necessary to protect the assets of the Trust and ensure that the existing plan is sustainable for the life of the next collective agreement. Anything less will result in the Trust having to draw down on reserves (that are necessary for the sustainability of the plan) and/or cuts to benefits that would be unacceptable.

 Extend all funding for jobs that was negotiated in the 2019-22 collective agreements (Investments in System Priorities, Education Worker Protection Fund, Community Use of Schools).

During the last round of collective bargaining CUPE/OSBCU prioritized the negotiation of funding to create jobs to help improve the quality of the education system and to restore jobs that had been cut after the expiry of the letter of understanding that established a minimum number of CUPE positions at each board. These funds came in the form of the Investment in System Priorities fund (ISP: \$58.7 million), the Education Workers Protection Fund (EWPF: \$20 million), and the Community Use of Schools Fund (\$638,320).

In 2020 OSBCU filed a number of central disputes because many boards had failed to use this negotiated funding appropriately. This resulted in a settlement that states that the jobs created with the ISP and EWPF funds will not be cut so long as the funding for these positions continues. The 2022-23 GSN will need to renew this funding in order to protect these positions and ensure students will continue to receive the services they need and deserve. Furthermore, the Ministry should direct boards not to cut education worker jobs in 2022-23 despite the expiry of LOU #3 in the CUPE/OSBCU collective agreement. Student needs will not change regardless of the expiry of the language that ensures a minimum complement of education workers will be employed to deliver services and supports. Directing boards to maintain staffing levels is a necessary component to meeting students' needs.

#### 3. Increase real per-pupil funding to 2011-12 levels

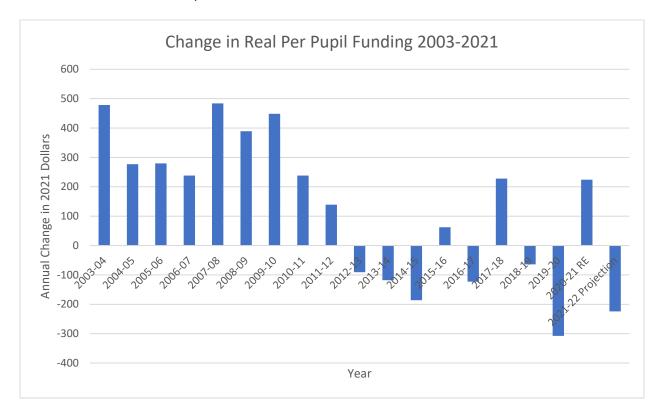
From 2002-03 to 2011-12 real per-pupil funding increased every year. In no small part this was necessary to restore funding that had been cut under the Conservative government of Mike Harris. Estimates of the cut to education in the Harris years range up to two billion dollars. Increases to funding during the 2002-12 period were also necessary to cover the costs of new programs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> CUPE EWBT, *CUPE EWBT 2020 Annual Report to the Parties*, presented to the Ministry of Education, Council of Trustees Associations, and CUPE/OSBCU in June 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> In 2001 the OFL calculated the cut to education at \$2 billion. Ontario Federation of Labour, *The Privatization of Ontario's Education System: 1995-2001*, OFL Education is a Right Task Force Report on Publicly Funded Education in Ontario, 2001, <a href="https://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2002.01.01-Report-EducationPrivatization.pdf">https://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2002.01.01-Report-EducationPrivatization.pdf</a>; in a recently published book the \$2 billion figure was repeated, Andy Hanson, *Class Action: How Ontario's Elementary Teachers Became a Political Force*, Between the Lines, 2021.

Since then, however, real per-pupil funding has been cut regularly. In seven of the ten years from 2012-13 to 2021-22 real per-pupil funding has been cut. In the 3 years of this decade when real per-pupil funding did increase, it was not enough to make up for the cuts of preceding years. In real terms, per-pupil funding is lower than it was in 2009-10.

In 2021 dollars, per pupil funding in 2011-12 (the last year before a decade of funding that did not cover the costs of inflation and increasing enrolment) was \$13,285, compared to per pupil funding of \$12,686 today – a difference of \$599 per student. If real per pupil funding had remained at the 2011-12 level for the past decade, there would be \$1.2 billion more in the GSN in the 2021-22 school year. This money would go a long way to meeting needs in schools, including the increased staffing for a range of job classifications that we identify below.



According to the Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review base funding for education is projected to increase by a meagre 1.6% in 2022-23, and by 0.6% in 2023-24, far below inflation and enrolment growth. Rather than further real cuts to education we recommend that base funding be increased by a minimum of \$1.2 billion (likely higher due to inflation and enrolment changes for the 2022-23 school year) to reestablish real per pupil funding to its high point in 2011-12.

The need for adequate funding was stated very clearly in the Rozanski Report in 2002 (the first, and to date only comprehensive review of the education funding formula in Ontario): "Education advances the well-being of individuals in society and of society as a whole. It expands the opportunities available to individuals, enables people to fulfil their potential, underlies economic success, and enhances social

cohesion. For those reasons, in democratic societies universal access to education is a common value and public education is seen as a fundamental responsibility of the state."

That sentiment was echoed by the Minister of Finance in the fall economic update on November 4, 2021: "Investing in schools helps support the long-term success of students." Sadly, this investment identified by the Minister is only related to capital funding — which is needed, for sure, but is by no means sufficient to meet the plethora of other needs that students have. Education is a labour-intensive process. It takes a lot of people to support student diverse needs. Investments should be based on the recognition that people need to be hired and compensated to deliver high quality education, not merely on highly visible projects like new buildings.

# 4. Tie funding to specific staffing levels by limiting employers' ability to use funds for purposes for which they were not generated.

Most of the grants and allocations in the GSN are not sweatered. That is, in most cases there is no requirement that funds generated for a specific purpose are spent on that purpose. One of the key exceptions is special education funding. Funds generated to pay for staff, for the most part, are not tied to staffing levels. Boards regularly move unsweatered money from one allocation to another to meet certain priorities. This suggests that some areas are structurally underfunded (e.g., special education, for which boards usually spend more than they are allocated by the Ministry) while other services are discretionally underfunded (i.e., priorities that generate more money through the GSN than boards spend on those jobs and services).

In order to eliminate this tension between the way funding is generated and the way money is spent by school boards we recommend that additional sweatering be built into the GSN. This recommendation must be coupled with a commitment to eliminate all structural underfunding (i.e., to make all funding adequate to meet existing needs). The recommendation should be accomplished through meaningful consultation with all unions in the school board sector to ensure that greater restrictions on school boards' ability to shuffle money around do not come with any unintended adverse consequences.

# 5. Increase all benchmarks to fully reflect the costs of negotiated central agreements and the real inflation of non-compensation related costs.

This should be an obvious recommendation that would be accepted without reservation. The most recent provincial budget, however, gives us cause for great concern. Projections for future funding increases for education are insufficient to meet ongoing needs, let alone the compensation increases that education workers deserve in their next collective agreement. Failure to cover the costs that are already foreseeable will put school boards in exceptionally difficult situations, making it impossible to balance budgets while still maintaining service levels for students and meeting collective agreement obligations. Accordingly, we find it necessary to recommend that all funding increases accurately reflect the real increases of existing staffing and non-staffing costs and include increases to cover costs associated with wage improvements and negotiated funding for new staffing positions. All other recommendations will, if adopted, also need to be increased annually to meet real projected cost increases.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Mordecai Rozanski, *Investing in Public Education: Advancing the Goal of Continuous Improvement in Student Learning and Achievement: Report of the Education Equality Task Force, 2002*, <a href="http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/task02/complete.pdf">http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/task02/complete.pdf</a>

6. Establish a provincial cleaning standard for schools, including the initial step of hiring an average of one additional permanent custodian per school.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to have higher cleaning standards in all schools. The Ministry recognized this in August 2020 when it allocated additional (although insufficient) resources to hire custodial and cleaning staff to help make schools safe for students' return to in-class instruction.

COVID-19 is not the only illness that can be prevented through enhanced cleaning. Annual cold and flu season always results in increased student and staff absence due to illness. Incidence of cold and flu could be reduced through increased cleaning, <sup>10</sup> which will by necessity require additional staffing of custodial positions. Prior to the pandemic, several Ontario school boards had lowered their cleaning standards as a cost savings measure. Some boards only required classrooms to be cleaned every second day, including areas with high touch surfaces.

To permanently improve the quality of cleaning in schools we recommend, as an initial measure, funding an average of one additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) custodian per school. Boards would have some flexibility on how to deploy additional staff. For example, larger schools with greater needs might be allocated more than 1 FTE custodian, while smaller schools might require less than a full FTE. We do, however, recommend that deployment of new custodians be done in consultation with local unions who are in a much better position to know the precise needs of schools at the board.

The hiring of additional custodians is, however, only the first step. We further recommend that the Ministry, in consultation with all unions in the school board sector, establish a minimum provincial cleaning standard that would define mandatory targets for frequency of cleaning, quality of cleaning, ratios of staff to floor area, and include accountability measures to ensure school boards achieve and maintain the standard. The establishment of an appropriate standard might require additional investments in custodial staff at a later date to meet the appropriate quality of cleaning.

7. Improve special education outcomes by hiring an average of one additional EA per school, with the goal of reducing student to EA ratios and targeting resources to students with the greatest needs.

School boards regularly spend more on special education than the funding they receive for special education. This indicates a general structural deficiency in funding from the Ministry of Education. Funding does not meet the ongoing basic needs of students. Insufficiency of funding is exacerbated by the use of predictive models for determining funding, and the use of outdated data for calculations. <sup>11</sup> Generally speaking there must be much greater attention paid to getting the correct balance between funding stability and funding based on the actual needs in schools, so that there is continuity of employment for special education workers and continuity of service for students with exceptionalities.

https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2015/02/CCPA-ON Harris Era Hangovers.pdf,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See for example, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, *How to Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu*, <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm">https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See for example Hugh Mackenzie, *Harris Era Hangovers: Toronto School Trustees Inherited Funding Shortfall*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 10, 2015, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Optario%200ffice/2015/02/CCPA-

People for Education regularly reports that there is a waiting list of students who need assessments for special education. Diviously there is a need for investments to clear this backlog. Providing assessments for all students on waiting lists will reveal the requirement for additional support staff to meet the newly identified needs. That is to say, the insufficiency of funding for special education will be revealed to be much greater, and an investment in additional staff will be required to meet that newly identified need.

Additionally, we can point to the working experiences of our members to identify the impact of underfunding and understaffing special education. In a 2018 survey of Educational Assistants we found that 60% of EAs provided support to 5 or more students. Fewer than 8% provide support to only one student. While we recognize that each student's needs are different, and not every student will need the full-time support of one or more EAs, workloads that include 5 or more students are untenable. At the time of the survey 76% of EAs reported that the number of students they support had increased over the previous 5 years, clearly indicating that student needs are increasing faster than the increase in staffing. Of those EAs who said they had not experienced an increase in the number of students they support fully half reported that they were already working with 5 or more students. Phrased slightly differently, half of members whose workloads (on a per-student basis) had not increased were already being overworked.

EAs provide vital services to students with special education needs. But EAs are also necessary to the overall teaching and learning environments in classrooms. They are part of an integrated team of educators in the classroom. Moreover, EAs do not only provide services and assistance to students with exceptionalities. They also provide supports to other students in classrooms where time allows. Without EAs, classrooms could not function at optimal levels. Investing in EAs will support all students' performance and help achieve classroom excellence.

8. Improve school administration by hiring an average of 0.5 FTE secretaries per school to address increased workloads due to additional duties being added to secretaries.

Office staff play a core function in the operations of schools. They are the face of the school to all visitors, provide a key link between the school and parents, regularly interact with students, teachers and other education workers, and ensure that administrative functions run smoothly. Despite this, office staff are often overlooked in discussions of funding. Over the past several years the workloads of office staff have increased tremendously, a problem that has been worsened by the increased administrative workload to deal with COVID-19 and the dual model of in-class and online learning. The introduction of door buzzers in schools, a useful safety measure, has meant that secretaries are spending significantly more time answering the door for visitors. Secretaries have taken on additional banking and cash handling responsibilities, taking them away from other core functions of their jobs. Moreover, many school boards have made the discretionary decision to cut secretarial positions that have been vacated due to retirements and resignations. Job losses by attrition have exacerbated the workload burden of school office staff.

Additional funding to hire more office staff will alleviate the additional workload and help make schools function more effectively. An investment to hire an average of 0.5 FTE school secretaries for every

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See for example People for Education, What makes a school? People for Education annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2019, <a href="https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PFE-2019-Annual-Report.pdf">https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PFE-2019-Annual-Report.pdf</a>

school in the province will go a long way to lessening the burden of overwork and give school office staff more time to help make schools function more effectively.

9. Double the number of library technicians employed in schools to enhance library services to students, improving their skills and outcomes.

High quality, well resourced, and well staffed libraries play an important role in educating students. The modern library is about more than just borrowing books. It plays a key link between library users and information in print and digital media. Developing the skills necessary to fully utilize libraries, and access information, does not happen on its own. It requires highly skilled staff, including library technicians, who can guide students, have a role in curriculum support, provide necessary instruction, and meet the differing needs of students. Funding should be sufficient to guarantee that every school has the resources available to properly staff school libraries, including a minimum complement of library technicians in each school. The funding model should recognize that larger schools will require a larger number of staff, but each school should have at least one library technician to deliver services to students. Funding should also be sufficient to keep properly staffed libraries open for the entire school day.

In addition to the work they do on a daily basis to make school libraries important centres of learning for students, library workers also worked diligently to make the transition to online learning possible. They provided regular support to students and staff, and demonstrated tremendous flexibility, agreeing to work that is normally outside of their job descriptions in order to assist with student supervision and other educational and administrative tasks at schools when access to physical libraries was limited or when libraries were closed. Library workers deserve recognition as members of the whole education team at schools. Hiring more library staff can only add to the educational experience for students and will provide support for other educators at schools.

10. Training for custodial staff to do preventative maintenance, including additional hours of work to do preventative maintenance.

With proper training, many routine maintenance tasks can be performed by employees who are not certified tradespersons. Training custodial workers to do preventative maintenance will allow certified tradespersons to focus on the specialized skills within their scopes of practice. Training custodians for these duties will help reduce costs at boards and free up time for skilled tradespersons to tackle more complex assignments. More will be accomplished and the physical condition of buildings can be preserved and improved more consistently.

We recommend the Ministry provides funding for preventative maintenance programs in all school boards, including training for custodial workers to do routine plumbing, and common electrical and carpentry work, freeing trades workers to focus on more complex tasks within their scopes of practice.

11. Fund the hiring of additional maintenance workers to address the existing \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs. The province will also need to develop a plan for eliminating deferred maintenance needs to protect infrastructure and provide the highest possible quality spaces for students to learn.

The benchmark funding for maintenance that was established in 1997 has not been fundamentally changed and has merely been adjusted for inflation over time. In 2015 the Auditor General estimated

that the ongoing maintenance needs for schools was \$1.4 billion per year, but the province had only committed between \$150 million and \$500 million on school maintenance from 2011 to 2015. Over time this shortfall in funding has led to an accumulated deferred maintenance bill of \$15.9 billion as of 2017. Due to continued insufficiency of funding this number is now over \$16 billion in deferred maintenance.

Poorly maintained buildings are not good learning environments. Buildings with heating or cooling problems, with leaky roofs, or broken plumbing are inhospitable environments for education. Deferred maintenance causes health and safety risks for students and workers alike. Maintaining quality buildings is a necessary starting point for a quality education system. Our members take pride in the work they do. But understaffing of trades, maintenance, and custodial staff, and underfunding of school maintenance and repair means there are external limits to what can be accomplished.

The province needs a plan for eliminating the current infrastructure deficit in schools. To forestall the possibility of future infrastructure deficits the Ministry will need to update benchmarks used to determine funding to reflect the actual costs of each school, including properly factoring in differing regional costs, as well as different costs associated with the age of buildings. Hiring additional maintenance staff to address ongoing upkeep and repairs will assist with controlling future deferred maintenance costs.

12. Additional funding for student supervision. This will help enhance student safety and reduce workloads of other staff who can use this time to focus on the core duties of their occupations, focusing on student needs.

The need for physical distancing, smaller class sizes and smaller student cohorts, created by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased need for student supervision staff. Reducing the education worker-to-student ratio is a necessary component of any strategy to effectively run in-class learning safely during a global health crisis.

Even prior to the pandemic the need for additional student supervision staff was clear. Education workers have seen increasing demands to add student supervision to their daily workload. These demands take time away from other core functions of their job descriptions. DECEs have been required to supervise students not in Kindergarten, taking them away from the core function of their job, and taking away paid preparation time that they require. Educational Assistants are put on general supervision duty, taking time away from the students they directly support, denying them preparation time and other time they need for their jobs. It is not uncommon for staff in other jobs to be taken away from their core duties for student supervision.

We agree that student supervision is necessary and should be adequately staffed. It should not, however, come at the expense of other education workers ability to focus on their core job functions, prep time, and areas of expertise. We strongly recommend that an average of 0.5 FTE permanent student supervision staff be hired for every elementary school in the province. This would add an additional 3.5 hours of student supervision (on average) to each school, help with ensuring student safety, and allow other education workers the ability to focus on the jobs for which they were hired. As with other positions, the deployment of additional staff might vary from school to school, and local unions should be consulted on how best to allocate additional staff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Office of the Auditor General, *Annual Report 2015*.

# 13. Additional funding to ensure all DECEs have a minimum of 35 hours per week for full-time jobs.

The accepted standard work week for a Designated Early Childhood Educator is 35 hours, which gives time for face-to-face interaction with students as well as non-instruction time for preparation and evaluation, often done in conjunction with a Kindergarten teacher partner. However, that standard is not met at all boards. Some boards schedule "up to" 35 hours per week, regularly scheduling for fewer hours. In some cases, DECEs are only scheduled for 30 hours per week, depriving students of the time they deserve with the DECE and denying the educator the non-instruction and prep time necessary to fulfilling the requirements of the job.

We recommend that the Ministry take measures to ensure that the standard of 35 hours per week is met for DECEs and provide the necessary funding so that all boards are able to meet this standard.

# 14. Ensure that there is one ECE in each Kindergarten class, including classes with fewer than 16 students.

Currently not all Kindergarten students in Ontario gain the benefit of having a DECE in their classroom. Regulations allow school boards to have a one-educator model of instruction in classes with fewer than 16 students. The two-educator model of one DECE and one Kindergarten teacher was established because it was recognized that our youngest learners benefited from play-based learning as well as curriculum-based learning. Having specialists in both approaches in the classroom establishes a strong base for lifelong learning and student success. Denying some students access to the two-educator model simply because they are in a relatively small class is arbitrary and unfair. Leveling the playing field and extending opportunities to all students would require increased staffing and regulatory changes that mandate that a DECE be assigned to every single Kindergarten class, regardless of the number of students in the class.

#### 15. Enhance funding for Community Use of Schools

During the last two rounds of central collective bargaining, CUPE/OSBCU negotiated Community Use of Schools funds in recognition of the fact that schools are vital community resources that should be made available for public use. These funds are used to ensure custodians are provided hours to keep schools open and clean for community events. This funding has demonstrated the value of having custodial staff on-site whenever schools are occupied by community groups or others who use schools for meeting spaces. Although community use of schools will be restricted until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a time (with care and good management that time can be relatively soon) when schools will once again play a more expansive role in the life of communities in addition to being sites of learning. We recommend that additional dedicated funding be made available to school boards to ensure that custodians are scheduled to be on-site whenever someone is using a school.

#### 16. Increase IT Capacity at all School Boards, Including Additional IT Staff

The pandemic exposed structural shortfalls in school boards' ability to meet the information and technology needs of students and staff. Boards lacked sufficient quantities of hardware to supply staff and students with the equipment they needed. Many non-teaching staff, who continued to have online instruction and support responsibilities, were left with hand-me-downs that did not meet there needs or

were left struggling to find their own hardware to support students and other staff. The GSN should be updated to provide ongoing funding for a technology renewal strategy that ensures that all staff and students have up-to-date technology for in-class and remote learning.

Furthermore, the past two years have highlighted the insufficiency of staff in IT departments. As the number of requests for technical assistance increases during periods of remote and hybrid learning the resources (i.e., staff) of IT departments were stretched beyond the breaking point. In order to fully support schools, including all student and staff needs, IT departments will need to increase their staffing complements in order to function properly, reduce wait times for assistance, and support the introduction of emerging technological innovations.

#### Issues Arising Out of the 2021-22 Education Funding Guide

#### 1. Mental Health Supports

- "How are ministry supports helping school boards meet the mental health needs of their students?"
- "What can the Ministry of Education, other ministries, school boards and other partner agencies do to better support the mental health needs of students?"

In a recent study on violence and harassment in Ontario schools, Chris Bruckert, Darcy Santor, and Brittany Mario concluded that existing supports in schools are not sufficient. It is helpful to quote at length from one of their key conclusions in the study:

There is a desperate need for adequate resourcing to ensure students are afforded the support they require to meet their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs. Accordingly, it is vital that resources to ensure the most vulnerable students are getting the help they need. This will require, among other things, augmented health services (e.g. early diagnosis and interventions), additional educational supports (e.g. EAs), and smaller classes to facilitate the individualized attention mandated by the *Education Act*. Moreover, despite the significant aid that EAs and ECEs provide, the benefit of these resources and the effectiveness of these workers may be curtailed or diminished without additional support to students outside of school hours.<sup>14</sup>

While this study covered a wide range of causes of, and expressions of, violence in schools, it is clear that the "emotional, cognitive, and behavioral needs" of students are not being met. A necessary condition to meeting the existing needs of students is providing more supports, including increased staffing levels. The problem of violence in the workplace is, of course, much more complicated and cannot be solved with a single remedy. But additional staffing is, undoubtedly, required to meet the needs of students.

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<u>34885059/documents/6c87009f685d41b7a78eddc4f3845d4e/In%20Harm's%20Way%20-</u>

%20Full%20Report%20November%202021.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Chris Bruckert, Darcy Santor and Brittany Mario, *In Harms Way: The Epidemic of Violence Against Education Support Workers in Ontario"*, University of Ottawa, November 2021,

This is, of course, not to suggest that all students who are experiencing poor mental health will act violently. Nor is it to suggest that students in distress, who exhibit behavioral problems, deserve to be blamed or dismissed. Instead, it is to highlight that student needs are not currently being met. Violent acts are merely one manifestation of this problem. The same solutions that will help address the problem of violence in schools will also help address all students' mental health needs (including by having more caring adults in schools to help identify students in need and guide them to available supports).

The report on violence in schools also identified the need to improve mental health supports for staff. Incidence of violence unacceptable, with 89% of survey respondents (i.e., CUPE education workers) indicating that they experienced "at least one act, attempt, or threat of physical force from one or more sources", and 95% of respondents indicating that they had experienced at least one form of harassment in the previous year (i.e., in the year leading up to February 2020). As a result of these experiences, education workers face a number of long-term adverse effects. For example, 18% of EAs "would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of harassment and 13.5% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of violence in the past year." <sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, over the course of the pandemic education workers have faced increased stress and anxiety due to workplace health and safety issues. Oftentimes education worker (custodians, EAs, ECEs, tradespersons, etc.) were the only staff in schools, regularly working with students who were unable to transition to online learning. Mental health supports are necessary to help mitigate the harms created by COVID-19. This government recently announced that money would be made available for healthcare workers to address their mental health concerns. <sup>16</sup> Education workers are deserving of additional supports as well.

Additionally, we would support additional investments in promoting the mental wellbeing of staff, including the creation of staff Mental Health Leads in all boards, in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of all staff. Mental Health Leads would need to be trained mental health professionals, accredited to provide support to adults. Moreover, these leads will need to have resources available to all staff suffering from poor mental health, including mental health promotion, early identification, prevention and intervention.

#### 2. The Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG)

• "Given that the 2021 census is nearing completion, what is the best way to integrate updated census information into the GSN?"

Using census data for calculating allocations within the GSN has risks because it is essentially a predictive model for funding. It is not based on a measure of actual need. There is always the potential that actual

https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-

34885059/documents/6c87009f685d41b7a78eddc4f3845d4e/In%20Harm's%20Way%20-%20Full%20Report%20November%202021.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Chris Bruckert, Darcy Santor and Brittany Mario, *In Harms Way: The Epidemic of Violence Against Education Support Workers in Ontario"*, University of Ottawa, November 2021,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ontario Ministry of Health, "Ontario Expanding Mental Health and Addictions Supports for Frontline Health Care Workers: Protecting our Progress by Improving Access to Supports and Services", News Release, November 9, 2021.

needs within schools will be greater than what can be projected using census data. Using outdated census data amplifies that risk by making predictions on data that cannot be guaranteed to be reliable.

Any change in the method of calculating allocations within the GSN compounds that risk. School boards have come to rely on a certain level of funding for service delivery and staffing. Updating the census data could, in some cases, increase some boards' allocations, giving them a greater opportunity to meet the actual needs at their boards. However, some boards might see reductions in funding, meaning staffing and service cuts that will rob students of the supports on which they have come to rely.

If the Ministry changes any of its calculation methods there must be mechanisms to ensure that no board sees funding cuts as a result of the change, and to build in measures of actual need. Funding needs to strike a balance between stability of service and employment levels and meeting the actually existing needs in schools. This will require adding factors on top of (or perhaps instead of) census data. Ultimately changes of this magnitude, which have the potential to result in large swings in education funding for many boards, should only be done with a more comprehensive review of the education funding formula, akin to the one that has been regularly recommended by unions, policy analysts, parent and education advocates, and the Auditor General.

 "Should the Demographic Component of the LOG be focused on a specific outcome(s)? If so, what are they?"

Education is a process, not merely an outcome. Focusing solely on some desired, measurable, and quantifiable outcome, misses everything that goes into achieving that outcome. The starting point for this discussion should be meeting ongoing and actually existing needs of students. This means providing the kinds of supports that we have identified in this submission. Improving the quality of the education process should be the priority: by guaranteeing that every kindergarten student has access to the two-educator model including an ECE; increasing the number of EAs in classrooms to provide support to students with exceptionalities (and those who just need some extra help); setting high standards for the cleanliness and repair of the buildings in which students learn; hiring more library staff to help students develop research skills and acquire a lifelong love of reading; ensuring that school office staff are not overworked and stretched to the limit.

#### 3. Urban Priority High Schools

- "Should the school board list be updated to respond to changing demographics and growth within school boards? If so, what factors should be considered in updating the school board list?"
- "How can the ministry ensure that the funding allocation is spent on supports for the most academically challenged at-risk students?"

CUPE/OSBCU continues to advocate for a comprehensive public review of the funding formula, guided by the principle of meeting all needs in schools, providing stable and sufficient funding, and recognizing the value of schools in the full development of communities in Ontario. In her 2017 report, the Auditor General of Ontario noted that the funding formula has not had a comprehensive review since 2002 and recommended that the funding formula be reviewed in its totality every 5 years. Although the annual formal, public consultation conducted by the Ministry of Education was seen by the Auditor General as

an important component to reviewing key funding areas, it does not substitute for a comprehensive public review.<sup>17</sup>

Expanding the number of boards eligible for resources is certainly consistent with everything that we have put forward in this submission. Expanding the list of boards eligible for the Urban and Priority High Schools Allocation is a good idea, so long as it does not result in cuts to funding at the boards that currently receive the allocation – i.e., do not stretch the existing pool of money across a larger number of recipients. But all of this must to be done in the context of meeting all student needs, which would best be identified through a comprehensive public review of the funding formula based on the principles we have articulated.

#### Conclusion

The recommendations we make in this submission are consistent with, and necessary conditions for meeting the Ministry's stated goals in the 2022-23 Education Funding Guide: "All students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a strong foundation of confidence that continues throughout their lives. Schools should be safe and welcoming places where all students are provided the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve success and follow their chosen pathways after graduation including work, college, apprenticeship or university." CUPE Education workers are committed to achieving the highest possible standards for students, enhancing student achievement, and building a world class education system in Ontario. We make that a part of our everyday contribution to schools across the province. But in order for us to continue to provide the highest quality services to students; for us to be able to help students "reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically" we need the government to do its part by fully funding all needs in schools and making additional investments into the system, such as the ones we recommend here. Students deserve nothing less.

DC:kw/cope491

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, *Annual Report 2017*, http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arbyyear/ar2017.html#volume1



# IN HARM'S WAY:

# THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AGAINST EDUCATION SECTOR WORKERS IN ONTARIO

### **FULL REPORT**

"With all the cutbacks it gets harder and harder to do our job.

More for less is not a good thing in education.

I feel we are just fire extinguishers going
from one incident to the next."

~ Education Assistant, Elementary School

Chris Bruckert, Darcy Santor and Brittany Mario University of Ottawa

November 2021

## **Foreword**

In 2019, the Harassment and Violence against Educators project released Facing the facts: The escalating crisis of violence against elementary school educators in Ontario. That report examined the experiences of elementary school educators with a primary focus on teachers. In this report, we examine the harassment and violence experienced by the often-overlooked classroom-based and school support workers in Ontario's schools who are not teachers - including educational assistants, early childhood educators, child and youth workers, clerical, maintenance/trade, and food service workers – but who are critical to the smooth running of our schools and who play a vital role in the education of Ontario's children. To the best of our knowledge this is the first study of its kind that examines harassment and violence in these education sector workers in Canada and the first to examine different profiles of sources (i.e., students, colleagues, parents, and administrators).

This report, which presents the results of the Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey, is organized into seven sections: (1) Scope of the Issue: Harassment and Violence against Workers in the Education Sector examines the extent, frequency, and nature of workplace harassment and violence experienced by classroom-based workers and school support staff in Ontario; (2) Impacts, Costs, and Coping focuses on the multifaceted and layered effects of workplace harassment and violence; (3) Context: Age and Incivility explores the relationship between rates of harassment and violence and incivility in the workplace; (4) Responses and Reporting unpacks the administrative and institutional response to violence and harassment; (5) Designated Groups: Vulnerability, Experiences, and Response considers the ways gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, Indigeneity and racialization impact the nature of, and response to, harassment and violence; (6) Comparison of Classroom-based and School support workers reflects on differences between the experiences of staff who work in the classroom and school support staff; and (7) Readiness and Training reports on the level of preparedness of education sector workers to deal with instances of harassment and violence and the training needs of these workers. The report's Conclusion provides a summary and recommendations. A word of caution that the descriptions of workplace violence in this report may be disturbing and triggering for some readers.

#### Methodological notes

Between February 3, 2020, and March 13, 2020, shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic, 3,854 CUPE Education Workers (Ontario) participated in the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey. These workers, both classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, designated early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, IT, and maintenance staff), were asked about their experiences of a broad range of workplace harassment (e.g., slurs, insults, and put-downs) as well as threats, attempts, and acts of physical aggression (e.g., hitting, kicking, pushing) in the 2018-2019 school year. They were also asked about administrative and collegial responses to those incidents and the impact that harassment and violence had on their physical, emotional, professional, mental, and social wellbeing. In addition to documenting experiences, the goal of this research was to consider how harassment and violence is conditioned by the school environment and by workers' intersecting identities. The study deployed a mixed methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative data were used to provide a fulsome picture of education workers' experiences. The quantitative analysis was generated using SAS/STAT software [Version 9.4] of the SAS System for Windows 10. The open-ended questions were thematically coded using NVivo software [Version 12] and subsequently subject to a horizontal and vertical analysis. In the interests of confidentiality all quotations are presented in italics but without other identifiers (e.g., gender, school board).

#### The investigators

Dr. Chris Bruckert is a professor of criminology at the University of Ottawa. She has been conducting research on, teaching about, and mobilizing against, gendered violence for over twenty-five years. Dr. Darcy A. Santor is a practicing clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Ottawa. He has a long-standing interest in mental health in young people and in school-based mental health. Brittany Mario is a PhD candidate in criminology at the University of Ottawa and has been a part of the Harassment and Violence Against Educators project since 2019. Her research interests include gendered violence and mental health impacts for women who experience violence.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank the participants who took time out of their busy schedules to answer questions about their experiences and for their willingness to provide open and frank descriptions. We would like to acknowledge the assistance CUPE/Ontario School Boards Council of Unions (CUPE/OSBCU) provided in forwarding the survey to its members, and the CUPE Local released officers who promoted the research amongst their membership. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

#### **Recommended citation**

Bruckert C., Santor, D., & Mario, B. (2021). In harm's way: The epidemic of violence against education support workers in Ontario. Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa.

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# **Key findings**

- 89% percent of participants reported at least one act, attempt, or threat of physical force from one or more sources (i.e., students, parents, colleagues, administrators) during the 2018-2019 school year. Most of the violence was student initiated: 70% of classroom-based workers and school support staff reported experiencing one or more acts of physical force (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, being hit by a thrown object) from a student during the 2018-2019 school year.
- There are alarmingly high rates of harassment against classroom-based and school support workers in Ontario's elementary schools: 95% of survey respondents reported at least one type of harassment from one or more sources (i.e., students, parents, colleagues, administrators) during the 2018-2019 school year.
- Women participants reported higher levels of harassment from students and parents, as well as higher levels of violence from students compared to their male counterparts; women also reported working more overtime, higher workload increases, less ability to meet workplace demands, and greater familial impacts.
- BIPOC participants reported higher rates of reprisals for reporting instances of harassment or violence. BIPOC participants' experiences of violence and harassment included racial slurs, microaggressions, and the targeting of religious and cultural symbols (e.g., hijab).
- Participants identifying as having a disability reported significantly higher levels of harassment from colleagues and administrators than did educators who did not identify as disabled. They also reported elevated levels of workplace reprisals and failure to accommodate (including when the disability was acquired at the workplace).
- Harassment and violence have lasting effects on mental health, physical health, and job performance. Higher levels of harassment and verbal violence, as well as higher levels of physical violence, were associated with diminished physical health, mental health, and job performance, even when assessed some six months after the school year in which the harassment and violence occurred.
- Results from the survey indicate that 18% of educational assistants (EAs) would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of harassment and 13.5% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of violence in the past year. Results of the survey indicate that one in six classroom-based workers and school support staff were either at imminent risk of burnout (7.21%) or would meet formal criteria for burnout (7.86%). The qualitative analysis of the data demonstrates that the risk of burnout and disengagement is exacerbated when a lack of collegial and administrative respect, support, and acknowledgment operates alongside rapidly evolving/increasing workplace expectations.
- Replacing classroom-based and school support staff for time lost due to workplace harassment or violence is conservatively estimated to cost Ontario at least 3.5 million dollars per year.
- Workplace violence and harassment have significant impacts on the personal lives of education sector workers. This result was particularly striking for classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants) - 87% indicated it had a substantial (and often multifaceted) impact.
- In terms of impact, frequent and seemingly less severe forms of harassment (e.g., a put down) are as significantly related to health and well-being as less frequent but more severe forms of harassment (e.g., false accusations).
- Over 80% of classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance) participating in the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Educators (Ontario) Survey indicated that the levels of harassment and violence have increased in the past ten years.
- Results indicate a disturbing normalization of workplace violence; EAs and early childhood educators (ECEs), in particular, report a general acceptance by administrators that violence 'is part of the job', creating a context in which the harms they suffer are minimized or negated. Participants also report being blamed when they experience workplace violence.

# What does the literature tell us?

In Facing the Facts: The escalating crisis of violence against elementary school educators in Ontario, we concluded that a "crisis of harassment and violence against elementary school educators in Ontario has emerged and intensified over the past 15 years" (p. 34). We also noted that, notwithstanding media attention (e.g., Burke, 2017; Latchford, 2017; Miller, 2019a, 2019b; Rosella, 2017; Shahzad, 2017; van Rooy, 2017; Westoll, 2017) and mobilization by federations and unions representing educators (e.g., ETFO, 2018; CTF, 2018; OECTA, 2017), student-initiated violence against educators has received limited scholarly attention in Canada (for notable exceptions see, however, Chen et al., 2019; Lanthier et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2011; Younghusband, 2009). By contrast, since 2011 when the American Psychological Association Board of Educational Affairs Task Force released its ground-breaking report on student-initiated workplace violence against educators, a body of literature on the topic has emerged in the United States.

When we examine the existing (predominantly American) literature on violence against educators, we see that while methodological differences (e.g., sampling method, time frame, definitions of violence) impede easy comparisons, studies consistently identify high levels of student-initiated violence against educators. Indeed, a 2018 meta-analysis by Longobardi et al., (2019) concluded that "the prevalence of any type of teacher-reported violence victimization within two years ranged from 20% to 75% with a pooled prevalence of 53%" (p. 1). Unsurprisingly, workplace violence is having a significant impact on education workers. Commonly noted adverse effects include high teacher turnover (Curran et al., 2019; Tiesman et al., 2014), elevated levels of fear (Wilson et al., 2011), damaged professional self-identity (Skåland, 2016), and - perhaps most consistently - poorer physical and psychological health (Gunnarsdottir et al., 2006; Konda, 2020; Landsbergis, 2018; Younghusband, 2009). The impacts of violence on the physical and psychological wellbeing of educators are related to another key finding from the literature - elevated levels of stress (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Konda, 2020, Landsbergis, 2018; Reddy et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2011; Younghusband, 2009).

Overwhelmingly, the above-noted literature focuses on teachers rather than other workers in the education sector (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators, clerical workers, maintenance personnel, food-services staff) – a population which, as Schofield et al. (2017) write: "may be in more precarious positions of employment. They may not be afforded the same level of contractual protections and benefits, training, preparation, supervision and/or economic compensation [...]. These factors, and others, may put them at increased risk of student-related injury and increase the potential impacts of workplace injuries." (p. 1). Notably, research conducted by CUPE Ontario (2017) found that "fifty-eight percent of EAs (i.e., educational assistants) were injured by a student during an 18-month survey period. Almost half required hospitalization or other medical attention beyond workplace first-aid" (n.p.). It is imperative that all education sector workers are included in conversations about the workplace violence that increasingly characterizes Ontario's schools. This report is one step towards that goal.

Imagine how it feels to have our government leadership constantly insulting you in the news? Imagine how it feels to have parents deem you greedy for wanting/begging for more support? How it feels to miss part of your lunch hour or breaks because you are dealing with behaviour? How it feels to not be allowed to relieve your bladder because it isn't break time but there are only two staff bathrooms for a team of fifty, and you can't be late for your next assignment, so you can't pee during your break or class time. Imagine how it feels to have to resist drinking water because then you will have to pee? Imagine how it feels to be belittled by the kids we support, by society, and most especially by our elected government leaders? We are constantly marginalized, criticized, and put down by everyone. It has become acceptable to treat us like garbage. (EA)

# Definitions of harassment and violence

The 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) was designed to assess the frequency of various forms of harassment and physical violence, the impact on the health and well-being of educators, and the learning environment of the classroom.

Definitions for harassment and violence were adopted from those of the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

#### Physically violent and threatening behaviour is ...

The exercise, attempt, or threat of physical force, or a statement or a behaviour that could reasonably be interpreted as a threat to exercise physical force. Examples include:

- exercising physical force (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, being hit by a thrown object, sexual
- an attempt to exercise physical force (e.g., trying to hit, kick, bite, or throw an object);
- any threat to exercise physical force (e.g., verbal threats, shaking a fist in someone's face, wielding a weapon, leaving threatening notes or sending threatening e-mails).

#### Workplace harassment is ...

Unwelcome words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, or demeaning to a worker or behaviour that intimidates, isolates, or discriminates against the targeted individual(s). It includes bullying, psychological harassment, and sexual harassment. Examples or workplace harassment include:

- verbal taunts and put-downs;
- remarks, jokes or innuendos that demean, ridicule, or offend;
- offensive phone calls, texts, social media posts, or e-mails;
- leering or inappropriate staring;
- unnecessary physical contact of a sexual nature;
- comments about someone's physical characteristics, mannerisms, or conformity to sex-role stereotypes;
- homophobic taunts;
- bullying;
- false accusations or spreading rumours.

#### Inappropriate behaviours are ...

Actions and/or words that may not meet the threshold for harassment but are nonetheless not acceptable behaviour in an educational setting. Unlike workplace harassment, inappropriate behaviour is not addressed in the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario. Examples include:

- obscene gestures;
- a single verbal insult;
- disrespectful attitude or actions (e.g., not recognizing the educator's authority or expertise, belittling);
- individuals "ganging up" against the target.

#### A note on the language of violence ...

Recognizing that education workers experience student-initiated workplace violence is not paramount to saying students are violent in the conventional sense of forming intent. One EA noted, "I think many of us struggle with terms like 'violence' [which] suggests intent to harm. Many behaviours we deal with are violent in nature, however, the students themselves are not violent in nature - they don't have the ability to express themselves in a safe/expected manner (e.g., poor communication or self-regulation skills)."

# Demographics of the sample<sup>1</sup>

#### Personal demographics

Gender: 88% of the sample identified as female, 10% as male, 0.08% as non-binary; the remainder chose not to disclose.

Age: Most participants were over 50 (35%) or between the ages of 41 and 50 (30%); 22% were between 31 and 40 years of age; 11% were under 30 years old; the remainder chose not to disclose.

Race/ethnicity: Most participants identified as white (84%); 3% as Asian, 2.6% as Indigenous, 2.2% as Black, 1% as Middle Eastern, and 0.9% as Latin American. 4.2% of respondents preferred not to answer.

Dis/ability: 6.6% of respondents indicated they identify as having a disability, 90% indicated they did not; the remainder preferred not to answer.

LGBTQ+: Only 2.4% of the sample identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community; 95% indicated they were not; 2.6% preferred not to answer.

Highest level of education: Most respondents indicated they had a college diploma (67%), 13% had an undergraduate degree, and 2.3% had a Bachelor of Education, 1% had a graduate degree in education, and 2.3% had a graduate degree in some other field; 9% had a high school diploma.

#### **Professional demographics**

Primary position: Most respondents (69%) identified as being classroom-based; 58% were educational assistants; 11% Designated Early Childhood Educators. A further 12% of participants were instructors, student supervisors, and library workers. 19% of participants identified as support personnel, which included office administrators (9.6%), custodial workers (7.3%), IT/AV support staff (0.7%), and maintenance staff (0.6%).

Workload: The majority (84%) of participants worked full-time; 4.5% worked permanent part-time; the remainder were either temporary (4.3%) or casual (4.6%) employees.

Experience: The average number of years worked in the education sector was 13.5 years. Approximately 20% of the sample had been working for five or fewer years, 24% for 6 to 10 years, 24% for 11 to 17 years, 20% for 18 to 25 years, and 11% for 25 or more years.

Student contact: Participants reported that, on average they spent, 43% of their time with students in grades K to 3; 23% with students in grades 4 to 8; 16% with students in grades 9 to 12.

School type: Most respondents worked in elementary schools (65%), 4% worked in kindergarten to grade 12 schools, while 3% were employed in middle schools. The remainder worked in high schools (15%); 11% of our sample indicated "other."

Community size: Most participants (43%) worked in communities of between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants; 22% worked in communities ranging from 100,000 to 500,001 inhabitants; 7% in communities from 500,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants: 13% in communities with over 1 million inhabitants.

Catchment area: Most respondents described their school's catchment area as suburban (41%) or urban (city center) (33%). 26% indicated the school was in a rural area. Most indicated that the school was in middle-class areas (58%), 25% described the catchment area as poor (22%) or very poor (3%) while 14% described the area as well off and 3% indicated it was an extremely affluent area.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Percentages have been rounded up or down.

# 1. Scope of the issue: Harassment and violence against education sector workers

"Violence in the education system is becoming an epidemic and is constantly being swept under the rug." (EA)

## 1.1 Harassment against education sector workers: Overview

#### Rates of harassment

Findings showed that certain forms of harassment and verbal violence, such as insults, put-downs, and/or obscene gestures from students, are experienced by 75% percent of classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance), whereas other forms, such as comments that ridicule, demean or offend (60%), being 'ganged up' on (32%), and the spreading of false accusations (25%) are experienced less frequently. Our results indicate that 95% percent of participants reported at least one type of harassment from one or more sources over the school year.

While physical violence from parents, colleagues, and administrators was rare, reports of harassment and verbal violence from parents, colleagues, and administrators, was substantially higher. Indeed, approximately one in six participants experienced false accusations from parents, one in five experienced false accusations from colleagues, and one in ten experienced false accusations from their administrator (i.e., principal or vice-principal). Reports of feeling 'ganged up on' from colleagues, parents, and administrators were also made by approximately one in ten educators. These findings suggest that classroom-based workers and school support staff are likely to experience harassment and verbal violence from a range of individuals, including parents, colleagues, and administrators.

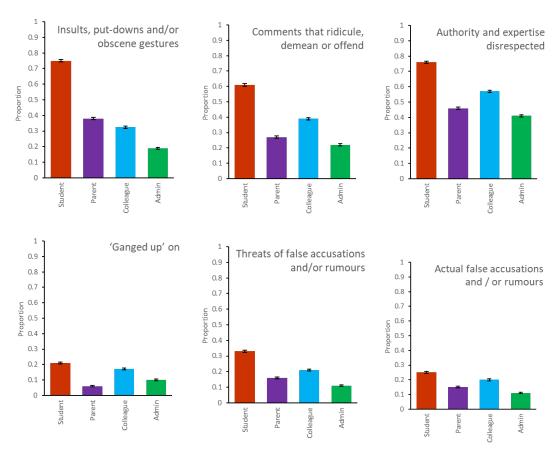


Figure 1: Rates of harassment experienced by CUPE education workers

#### **Description**

When 95% of education sector workers – both those who work in classrooms and those, like clerical workers, who do not – indicate that they experienced at least one type of harassment in the 2018-2019 school year, we can confidently assert that harassment against classroom-based workers and school support staff in Ontario's schools is a significant problem. Indeed, for some education sector workers the abuse is ubiquitous; one wrote of a "large group of students [who] chose to display non-compliant, rude, taunting, mocking, and verbally abusive behaviour toward me on a continual basis."

When asked about their worst incident of harassment or inappropriate behaviour in the 2018-2019 school year, almost half (48.9%) of the survey participants indicated that the harassment was student-initiated. The next most common group (25.6%) were colleagues (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators, custodians, teachers, but excluding administrators); by contrast, parents (10.5%) and administrators (11.8%) were much less likely to be named. We see also that the experiences and kinds of harassment vary across perpetrator types; this specificity is examined below.

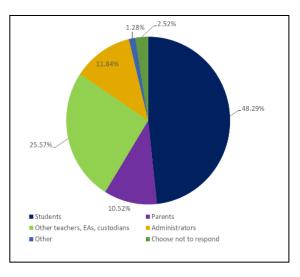


Figure 2: Persons who initiated the worst incident of harassment

#### Student-initiated harassment

Education sector workers described verbal abuse – predominantly comprised of disrespectful behaviour such as yelling and swearing - from students. Attending to the content of the abuse - what was said/shouted - highlights the fact that students are deploying racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and fatphobic language to denigrate workers. In other

words, intersecting identities inform the nature of the abuse to which workers are subjected. For example, one survey respondent recounted, "The student called me names, swore at me and told another staff member that I kicked him when in fact I used the Behaviour Management Systems that the school board trains us in and blocked his kick to my leg with my foot. He called me ugly, stupid bitch, whore, n\*\*\*, and fucker. He was in senior kindergarten with no official diagnosis.'

Please know that every word and every action you can imagine has been taken out on a EA. Cunt, bitch, whore, fucker, faggot. ALL of it has been said to me and to every other EA I work with. It is endless. (EA)

Another, highlighting the gendered undertones of much of the abuse women workers reported, described being "belittled or put down due to my age. A Grade 5 female student tried to scare me with threats to my safety, using the weakness of my age and looks 'you' re fat, old, have warts on your face so I don't have to listen to you'."

False accusations or rumours (or threats thereof) were also a common manifestation of student-initiated harassment for survey participants. As noted above, 25% of respondents had been the victim of student-initiated false allegations or rumours in the 2018-2019 school year. Participants detailed stories of students (falsely) claiming that an education

sector worker had been verbally, sexually, or physically aggressive. Such accusations, sometimes amplified by parents, can have serious ramifications for the well-being of workers who live under a cloud of suspicion until (and sometimes even after) they are cleared of wrongdoing: "A student assaulted me and then made a false allegation of abuse against me. My supervisors had to phone CAS as they have to report. I was exonerated but I have 2 little boys and the thought that a student could potentially put me in danger of losing my job and my children was awful. This affected every aspect of my life." Participants also told us that students would frequently and

Verbal threats and school lockdowns. Rude comments, being verbally abused by students, and generally disrespected. Feeling like I am thankful to be going home rather than heading to the hospital. Being bit, kicked, punched. scratched, having my shirt ripped, objects being thrown at me on top of verbal abuse and laughter throughout as if was a game. This is a REGULAR occurrence in our school. (EA)

overtly undermine their authority or question their professional competency. The following quotation illustrates not only the experience of being belittled and disrespected but also speaks to false accusations: "I asked a student several times to remove his hat in class, he refused and told me to fuck off and to stop picking on him. He accused me of bullying him and said his mom says he doesn't have to show respect to EAs."

#### Parent-initiated harassment

Survey participants described harassment from parents as principally comprised of disrespectful comments, yelling, and/or swearing. They explained that the disrespect from parents was demeaning and belittling in nature and that their

authority and professional capability were often questioned. These experiences are exemplified clearly in this respondent's story: "When trying to communicate to parents the challenges their child had in the classroom both socially and physically, I was verbally attacked for not doing my job, not being educated enough, for not protecting their child from others. I was trying to come up with strategies and solutions and they constantly blamed everyone around the student and did not seem

A parent was very dismissive of me due to my age. She began yelling in the hallway, swearing at me and saying I must be a joke because there was no way I was qualified to help her child. She was eventually escorted out of the building. (EA)

interested in working together. The father would scream and yell during meetings accusing me of many things, when the whole time I was trying to help his child. Eventually I stopped going to meetings and the principal had to deal with these parents."

#### Colleague-initiated harassment

Harassment by colleagues overwhelmingly took the form of belittling and having professional expertise questioned, undermined, and undervalued. In fact, over half (56%) of survey respondents indicated that they had at *least* one incident of colleagues either belittling them or questioning/not recognizing their authority and expertise in the 2018-2019 school year. Survey participants described being left out of team decisions and meetings, having their skills and expertise scrutinized and criticized, being micromanaged, repeatedly told how to do their job, and being spoken to in a condescending manner.

Many of these behaviours are repetitive, and as such, they bear the hallmarks of workplace bullying (Hutchinson,

2013); like much workplace bullying, occupational status stratifications appear to be implicated. One early childhood educator described her experience, "[I was] belittled by my teaching partner. Disrespected in front of parents. The teacher was telling parents that I am not as important. That I am just the ECE [early childhood educator] and didn't go to university like a teacher." Another participant, an educational assistant, described "feeling left out, undervalued as an EA." Workers also spoke of not having their professional judgement and competence respected: "On a regular basis, I am questioned on my ability to make decisions about the student that I care for,

I would often be undermined in front of the students, or my opinions based on the student that I directly worked with were not accepted. I was actually told to not interfere, redirect or discipline in the classroom. I was expected to just sit at the back of the room and only interact with the student that I was assigned to when needed. Often comments would be made of a demeaning nature in general about women.

and regardless of my experience and training they make it quite clear that it is above my position to make these kinds of decisions."

#### Administrator-initiated harassment

Harassment from administrators (i.e., principals and vice-principals) can take a range of forms and, to the extent that it often includes belittlement and the questioning of professional expertise, replicates the harassment these workers experience from colleagues. Education-sector workers detailed many stories of their administrators or supervisors

being condescending and generally undervaluing their work this manifested in a lack of aid during and after a crisis with a student, being left out of meetings, micromanaging their work, and being ignored. For example, one early childhood educator described her experience: "The amount of times Admin would walk into the room, scan the environment, and walk right past me to talk to the teacher. If I walked past her in the hallway and

My administrators demeaned my skills in front of other workers and went out of their way to make me feel unwelcomed with glares, eye rolling, and under-the-breath remarks. (EA)

said 'hello' she would look at me and completely ignore me. I was told by her that 'I did not need to come to parent teacher night as her teaching staff were quite capable on their own.' Constantly being left out of meetings regarding my students' behaviour and diagnostic results because 'the teachers will pass on the information'. The list goes on and on."

### 1.2 Violence against education sector workers: Overview

#### Rates of physical violence

The proportion of classroom-based workers and school support staff experiencing different forms of violence are depicted in Figure 3. Results show that 70 percent of classroom-based workers and school support staff experienced some type of physical force (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, being hit by a thrown object) during the 2018-2019 school year, more than 70% report one or more attempts to use physical force by a student, and almost 60% experienced one or more threats to use physical force during the same period of time. These rates are alarmingly high. 89% percent of participants reported at least one act, attempt, or threat of physical force from one or more sources over the 2018-2019 school year. Expectedly, the proportion of classroom-based workers and school support staff experiencing threats, attempts, and acts of physical force from parents, colleagues, and administrators was low but not insignificant; one in twenty participants experienced a threat to use physical force from a parent during the 2018-2019 school year. Threats to use force from colleagues and administrators were extremely low but nonetheless still present.

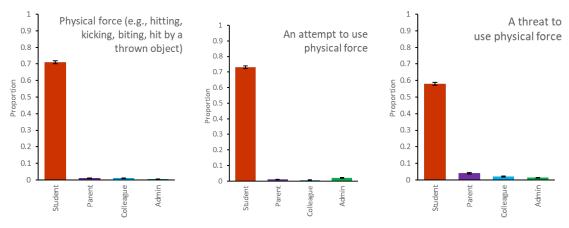


Figure 3: Rates of violence experienced by education assistants, early childhood educator and school support staff.

#### Description

Classroom-based workers and school support staff explained that acts, attempts, and threats of physical force were overwhelmingly perpetuated by students. Unsurprisingly, those educators who had the most direct contact with students (e.g., EAs, ECEs) also experienced the most violence. These participants wrote in detail about being kicked,

hit, punched, slapped, choked, scratched, strangled, spat at, head butted, kneed in the crotch, and threatened (and sometimes cut) with scissors. They also spoke of having to dodge thrown items, being assaulted by meter sticks, being tripped, being urinated on, having their hair pulled, getting their clothes torn, and being bit – in one case "so badly that the doctor asked me what kind of animal it was." Often acts of aggression are accompanied by swearing, name calling, and verbal abuse. Verbal aggression that, as we examine further in Section Five of this report, disturbingly often racist, sexist, sizeist, homophobic, and Islamophobic. One participant summed it up as: "Getting spit at, chairs being thrown, being called demeaning names (C\*nt, b\*itch, wh\*re, f\*ck off, etc.), getting hit, punched, kicked, screamed at, my family demeaned and threatened, my life threatened. Not just one incident, but ongoing throughout every day."

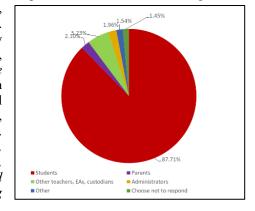


Figure 4: Persons who initiated the worst incident of violence

I was often left by myself in a padded room with an extremely violent grade four boy. I have permanent nerve damage in my leg. I ended up on a mental medical leave due to panic attacks. (EA)

The acts of aggression participants described were not (as the general public might imagine) the ineffectual tap of an annoyed youngster, but were serious and sometimes terrifying experiences (e.g., "having the class evacuated [and] being alone with a student and having that student throw objects at me such as scissors, chairs, books while telling me they will kill me") that can result in significant physical injuries to education sector workers, including concussions,

fractures, dislocated joints, back and head injuries, infections, and whiplash. In short, these can be serious assaults that have long-term impacts on the workers who then find themselves off work, undergoing physical therapy, paying for counselling, unable to do everyday activities, and/or "in pain daily." For example, one participant described needing to take time off work after she was "attacked by a grade 8 student resulting in

Over the years it has affected a lot of my life. I've had numerous injuries, broken bones, scratches, bruises and so on. Now close to my retirement I have a terminal illness. (EA)

concussion, retinal detachment, and jaw and neck injuries." Another wrote: "I was punched in the face by a grade 12 student. I went to hospital and he had shifted my jaw. He was suspended for a week but I was off for two weeks because of the pain." And a third described her experience after being assaulted by two students: "My tooth was chipped, and I had a concussion which progressed to Post Concussion Syndrome and PTSD."

While often emerging in the context of escalation, these incidents can also be random acts of aggression: "I was punched in the back by a student when his bus wasn't on time. Did not expect it at all." Similarly, while certainly some of the aggression is emulating from students with complex needs, this is by no means always the case: "A student

was extremely defiant, oppositional, hostile and hit/punched/kicked/bit me almost daily. This student doesn't have special needs." Moreover, a number of participants pointed out that they sustained injuries when they were endeavouring to protect other students or colleagues; one told us "I was body blocking my pregnant co-teacher while the student threw chairs at us."

I put my body between the outburst and other students in the class. My job is no longer to assist in education it is to manage behaviour. That is not what I was originally hired for. (EA)

Another described: "A grade five was yelling at another student. Another staff directed the student to the gym. Student continued to yell and push the other student. I used my body to block the hits. I tried to talk the student to calm down. I was pushed four to six times." A third explained that "while blocking one student from attacking peers [he] grabbed both my breasts extremely hard."

Unsurprisingly school support staff with less frequent and/or ongoing direct contact with students (e.g., clerical workers, custodial staff) reported dramatically less violence from students. That said, these workers also experienced acts of aggression and identified students as the most likely perpetrators of threats, attempts, and acts of violence. For example, one participant wrote: "I am not in a classroom. I [have] been kicked and punched, on a regular basis, just

walking past students." It would appear, however, that clerical staff are particularly vulnerable precisely because "students are being sent to the office when in an escalated rage." One clerical worker told us that she "can't work because [she is] keeping an

A student spit in my face while I was fixing a broken window. (Custodian)

eye out for flying objects." Others were directly targeted ("a student came across the desk and punched me in the face and ripped my glasses off") or indirectly because they were "in the line of fire" when, for example, "an escalated student was spitting at administrators." Here too, workers are often subjected to language that, in the picturesque words of one clerical worker, "could even make a sailor blush."

In short, not only is violence experienced by classroom-based workers and school support staff outrageously high, but the violence is pervasive and potentially very serious. Participants noted that increases in aggression coupled with decreasing staffing levels leave workers facing volatile situations without adequate support. One EA explained: I worked in a grade one classroom with another EA and teacher. I had six kids with complex needs; four of the six students had one-to-one support the previous year and last year this support was cut down to two EAs with no coverage for our lunches and breaks.

# 1.3 Frequency of harassment and violence

The 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Educators (Ontario) Survey was designed to assess the frequency of various forms of harassment and physical violence, their impact on the health and well-being of classroom-based workers and school support staff, and how they affect the learning environment of the classroom. Participants in this survey were asked to indicate how often they experienced harassment and violence in a multiple-option format (e.g., none, 1 to 3, 4 to 10, 11 to 20, more than 20 times). From these responses (see Figure 1 on page 7), we were able to calculate the proportion of educators who experienced any harassment or violence at all and also estimate the overall frequency of different forms of harassment and violence.

The mean number of incidents for various types of harassment from different sources, including students, parents, colleagues, and administrators, is reported in Table 1. These results show that classroom-based workers and school support staff report approximately 8.5 instances of insults, put-downs, and gestures from students, 1.22 from parents, 1.37 from colleagues and 0.70 from administrators in a single year. The mean number of jokes or innuendo intended to demean was similarly high. In contrast, the mean frequency of false accusations and rumours experienced from students (1.05) was higher than the mean frequency experienced from parents (0.28), similar to the mean frequency experienced from colleagues, but lower than the mean frequency experienced from administrators (0.35). The frequency of physical force (8.64), attempts to use physical force (9.14), and threats of physical force (6.52) from students was high relative to the frequency of physical force, attempt to use physical force, and threats of physical force from parents, colleagues, and administrators, which was less frequent but still present. Estimates concerning the frequency of harassment and violence indicate that for most individuals who experience harassment and violence, these are repetitive occurrences rather than isolated incidents. Classroom-based workers and school support staff who experience harassment and violence are likely to experience multiple instances of different types throughout the entire school year. These results speak to the fact that harassment and violence is very much a repetitive and ongoing experience.

Table 1: Frequency of harassment and physical violence from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators

		Student			Parent		(	Colleagu	ie	Ac	lministr	ator
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Insults, put-downs, gestures	3865	8.47	8.73	3863	1.22	3.29	3854	1.37	3.73	3854	0.70	2.71
Jokes or innuendo that demean	3864	5.44	7.68	3868	0.77	2.52	3867	1.68	4.10	3862	0.76	2.81
Authority, expertise disrespected	3868	8.36	8.59	3874	1.82	4.22	3866	2.97	5.46	3854	1.94	4.58
Being 'ganged up' on	3815	1.02	3.47	3816	0.13	1.03	3812	0.61	2.53	3810	0.36	2.03
Threats of false accusations	3821	1.91	4.83	3822	0.73	2.75	3822	0.73	2.75	3816	0.35	1.92
Actual false accusations	3816	1.05	3.48	3815	0.28	1.36	3814	0.67	2.55	3816	0.35	1.99
Use of physical force	3117	8.64	8.89	3121	0.01	0.14	3122	0.03	0.60	3123	0.02	0.43
An attempt to use physical force	3117	9.14	8.98	3121	0.02	0.52	3121	0.02	0.42	3121	0.01	0.37
A threat to use physical force	3117	6.52	8.46	3122	0.06	0.77	3123	0.06	0.76	3119	0.04	0.71

The quantitative findings in Table 1 are consistent with what participants described. For example: "Every day in the 2018-2019 school year my fellow workers and I were harassed and physically abused. We had a couple students that were very aggressive, and we had to try and deal with them. EVERYDAY!"

The frequency with which harassment and violence is experienced made identifying and describing the "worst" incident difficult for participants: "We deal with so many it is not possible to choose one to reflect upon." Another participant explained, "I cannot choose the most significant one. There have been at least three or four that stand out to me. When it requires five adults to restrain a student, who is a threat to themselves and others, then you cannot choose which one of those events is the most significant." Indeed, so pervasive is the violence that it has, for some educational assistants, become almost routine: "As an EA violence in the workplace, I consider part of the job as it occurs regularly." Sadly, some participants' experiences of violence are so ubiquitous that violence has become unremarkable: "It had become such a routine that violence from students no longer stuck out to me as

The simple fact that I go into a classroom every day with 20-28 other children (aged 3-12) watching as I get physically abused should be significant enough. Every day that I finish work and I haven't been kicked, hit, punched, or bitten I consider a fantastic day. Children are literally beating up adults. This is all significant!!! And we are subjecting other children to this violence. Talk about traumatic! (EA)

something that shouldn't be happening. I truly thought it was part of my job to accept to put up with this from students."

### 1.4 Increasing rates

Based on the findings of their longitudinal analysis of Ontario WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) lost time claims between 2002 and 2015, Cynthia Chen, Peter Smith, and Cameron Mustard (2019) report that "a pronounced increase in workplace violence injury rates was observed in the education sector with an APC=7.0% (95% CI 5.6% to 8.5%) for women and an APC=4.1% (95% CI 0.9% to 7.4%) for men" (p. 3). They concluded: "When looking into specific industries, we observed an increase in workers' compensation violence claims from workers in the education sector, compared with the healthcare and other industry groups" (p. 6).

There has been a decrease in the amount of EAs to a school. We are asked to support multiple students who are entitled to individual EAs. And students who are suspected to have a special need but are not diagnosed will be piggy backed onto a student who has an EA. Sometimes multiple students are placed in one EAs care. This can result in an increase of behaviours and safety concerns. (EA)

Virtually all classroom-based workers and school support staff participating in the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Educators (Ontario) Survey indicated that the levels of harassment and violence have increased in the past ten years, with the majority – around 60% – stating that levels of harassment and violence increased a lot. A further 20% reported that the levels of harassment and violence increased somewhat in the past ten years.

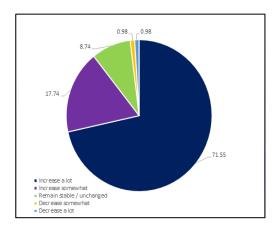


Figure 5a: The levels of harassment and inappropriate behaviour in schools within the last

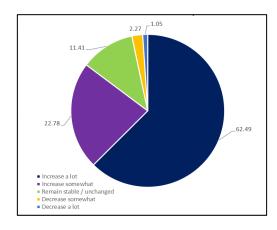


Figure 5b: The levels of violence in schools within the last ten years

The educational assistant job has drastically changed since beginning my career. It is no longer about academic and physical needs of students. It is strictly behaviour support for all students, identified or not. (EA)

We no longer have anything to do with education, as EAs our new role is bodyguard and bouncers. We are only here for behaviours. We have nothing to do with education!! That is not what I signed up for 20 years ago. (EA)

I find the level of violence in mainstream classrooms has gone up very much, making EA's job about working with students with behaviour problems. The students who have learning disabilities have no support at all and are further and further behind [and] often become behavioural students later on. (EA)

In the 21 plus years I've worked in education the job has become more violent and unpredictable. [...] We are verbally and physically abused daily. We used to be able to use sick days as mental health days to recoup but now we can't. [...] I'm counting the years to retirement. (EA)

# 2. Impacts, costs, and coping

"It has deadened me." (EA)

### 2.1 The magnitude of the impact on educators' health and well-being

The effect of harassment and violence against classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance) was evaluated in the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Educators (Ontario) Survey in a number of ways. We asked participants to estimate the impact of their worst incidents of harassment and violence during the 2018-2019 school year on (a) their physical health, (b) their mental health, (c) the learning environment in their classrooms, and (d) their perceived ability to do their jobs. These questions were designed to estimate the impact of the incident on their functioning in the days and weeks following their experience of harassment and violence. We also asked educators about their physical and mental health in the two weeks prior to completing the survey. This question was designed to provide initial evidence regarding whether an event experienced during the 2018 (Sept) to 2019 (June) school year still exerted an effect on functioning seven or more months later, in February and March 2020, when the survey was conducted.

Table 2: Relationship between health, well-being and the amount of harassment and violence experienced

	Total amount of	Total amount
	harassment and	of physical
	verbal violence	violence
Harassment negatively affected my physical health	0.44***	
Harassment negatively affected my mental health	0.45***	
Harassment negatively affected my ability to do my job	0.42***	
Harassment negatively affected the learning environment of the classroom	0.41***	
Harassment negatively affected other students in the classroom	0.40***	
Violence - affected my physical health		0.51***
Violence - affected my mental health		0.50***
Violence - affected my ability to do my job		0.42***
Violence negatively affected the learning environment of the classroom		0.60***
Violence negatively affected other students in the classroom		0.59***
Overall mental health in the last month?	-0.31***	-0.24**
Overall physical health in the last month?	-0.25***	-0.20**
Overall performance at your job over the past year?	-0.23***	-0.17**

Note: \*\*\* p < 0.0001; \*\* p < 0.001

The results presented in Table 2 show that the total amount of harassment and verbal violence (e.g., insults, innuendo, disrespect, false accusations, feeling 'ganged up on') was correlated with poorer levels of physical and mental health, as well as with lower levels of performance at work and with a diminished learning environment. Similarly, results in Table 2 show that the total amount of physical violence (i.e., attempts, threats, and acts) was again positively correlated with poorer levels of physical health and mental health, as well as with lower levels of performance at work and with a diminished learning environment. These findings suggest that the impact of harassment and violence has lasting effects on mental health, physical health, and job performance. Higher levels of harassment and verbal violence, as well as higher levels of physical violence, were associated with diminished physical health, diminished mental health, and diminished job performance even when assessed some six months after the school year in which the harassment and violence occurred.

It impacts EVERYTHING! I gave up my life outside of work for years until I hit my breaking point. I started having panic attacks on my lunch break at work and go days without sleeping as I was so worried about work. It broke me. I gave up my social life for my work. I went months without seeing anyone but my coworkers and students. Now I'm on stress leave and I'm even more segregated. I see no one. (DECE)

### 2.2 Physical and mental health impact

Participants wrote of the devastating impacts harassment and violence had on their mental and physical well-being. Recurring themes included anxiety and panic attacks; general fearfulness, "jumpiness," and being hyper-aware; depression, hopelessness, and overwhelming sadness; PTSD and flashbacks; an inability to concentrate; and both excessive emotionality and emotional "deadness." For some, preexisting conditions were exacerbated by workplace experiences: "I already have a depression and anxiety disorder. When I am involved in the de-escalation of a violent student, my anxiety tends to go up."

Participants who worked in classrooms (e.g., EAs, ECEs) reported somewhat higher mental health effects (19%

compared to 15%) and significantly higher physical health effects (11% compared to 5%) than did school support workers. These physical health effects, which were also noted in Table 2 on page 14, include aches and soreness, injuries ranging from bites to fractures to concussion, stress related health concerns (e.g., headaches, elevated blood pressure), and high rates of

A student threw a desk at me and crushed my shin. I have a permanent disability now and can only work 9 hours a week and may not be able to continue working at all. (EA)

insomnia: "I deal with frequent tension headaches, difficulty settling at night as I think about work and residual aches/pains in my knee and back as a result of violent acts from students."

#### Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Classroom-based workers and school support staff also completed a checklist of the post-traumatic stress symptoms

they experienced following their worst instances of harassment and violence.<sup>2</sup> Results from the survey indicate that 13.5% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of violence in the past year and that 18% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of harassment in the past year. Results in Table 3 show that symptoms of PTSD were associated with lower levels of overall functioning and lower levels of job commitment, as well as a

PTSD! Many times I've left work not being able to clear my head with regards to everything that transpired. Why did this happen? Did I do something wrong? Could I have done anything differently? Your adrenaline is going and then the let down can be very emotional! (EA)

greater number of days off work following both a worst instance of harassment (r=0.43) and a worst instance of violence (r=0.42).

	Symptoms of PTSD following a worst instance of harassment	Symptoms of PTSD following a worst instance of violence	Total degree of burnout experienced
Overall wellbeing	-0.28	-0.30	-0.58
Overall commitment to work	-0.15	-0.17	-0.40
Not able to meet demands of the job	0.15	0.20	0.48
Time off work after experiencing an instance of harassment	0.43		0.21
Time off work after experiencing an instance of violence		0.42	0.15

Table 3: Association between PTSD, Burnout and measures of wellbeing and workplace functioning

My negative work experiences impacted every aspect of my life. I struggled with sleeping, anxiety, panic, [and] my stomach would get so bloated from the stress. I was emotional and reactive when I went home, and I was preoccupied with the level of dysfunction that I could not escape from. It impacted my ability to be happy and enjoy life. (EA)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Participants completed the Short Screening Scale for DSM-IV posttraumatic stress disorder (Breslau, Peterson, Kessler & Schultz, 1999).

#### 2.3 Professional costs

Unsurprisingly, participants experienced professional costs because of workplace harassment and violence – costs which exacerbate, and operate in conjuncture with, personal impacts. Some participants noted decreased self-esteem

and lack of confidence resulting in "self-doubt as to my ability to support students." Others noted they reflected on the situations – and their response – long after the events occurred: "Many times I've left work not being able to clear my head with regards to everything that transpired. Why did this happen? Did I do something wrong? Could I have done anything differently?" Given that, as we saw previously, one of the most common forms of harassment was feeling belittled and having

It affects the way I see myself, [it] causes self-doubt and negative self-talk. I have questioned my career choice, explored other options, and thought about leaving education. I take my anger and frustration out on my son sometimes even though it has nothing to do with him. (EA)

one's professional skills and authority questioned, it is hardly surprising that workers feel undervalued. One respondent specifically described feeling "totally unappreciated by superiors, parents, [and] some students."

#### **Occupational Burnout**

The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon (i.e., that exists in the workplace) rather than a medical condition. Burnout is characterized by: (1) Feeling depleted or exhausted at work; (2) Feeling mentally disengaged from one's job, negative or cynical about one's job; and (3) Diminished performance and efficacy on the job. Participants wrote about their experience of burnout describing "dreading going to work," feeling "discouraged," losing their "passion for the job," and being "sad that I don't love my job as much as I used to." Although not a medical condition itself, high levels of burnout can dramatically increase the risk for other disorders, such as clinical depression (Koutsimani, Montgomery & Georgant, 2019).

Results of the survey indicated that one in six classroom-based workers and school support staff were either at elevated risk of burnout (7.21%) or would meet the formal criteria for burnout (7.86%). Results in Table 3 (on page 15) also showed that features of burnout were associated with lower levels of overall functioning and lower levels of job commitment, as well as a greater number of days off work following both a worst instance of harassment (r=0.21) and days off work following a worst instance of violence (r=0.15). Further analysis showed that the degree of burnout predicted the number of days off work following an instance of harassment, above and beyond any impact of symptoms of PTSD.

Importantly, the qualitative analysis of the data demonstrates that the risk of burnout and disengagement is exacerbated when there is a lack of collegial and administrative respect, support, and acknowledgment, and that this operates alongside rapidly evolving/increasing workplace expectations. Here participants drew attention to "cuts to staff and greater student needs" and were deeply frustrated "with the increased number of needs I feel like I am not able to provide the best for any of the number of students I am expected to support." Not surprisingly, notwithstanding their dedication and affection for the children they support, many wrote about looking for other jobs or "counting the days till retirement." In the words of one: "I used to be passionate about my job and I'm only four years in and already feel like I can't do this much longer."

# 2.4 Economic costs: Days off work and associated costs

In the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Educators (Ontario) Survey, classroom-based workers and school support staff were asked if they took time off work because of their worst incident of harassment and/or violence and, if so, how much time. In addition to estimating the number of days individuals are likely to be absent from the school, we were able to estimate the financial costs that would be incurred by a school board to hire a replacement for the day.

Not all classroom-based workers and school support staff who experienced harassment and violence took time off work because of their experiences. Of the 2293 individuals who reported a significant incident of harassment in the 2018-2019 school year, 687 individuals (30%) took time off work. The mean number of days off work for these 687 individuals was 6.34 (SD=7.00). Using the per diem rate of \$185.29,<sup>3</sup> the average cost associated with hiring a replacement for each of these individuals was \$1,175.12 (per incident).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Per diem costs is calculated as the average cost across all 111 collective agreements boards in Ontario. This is based on a mean hourly rate of \$26.47/hour for seven hours a day, for a total of 185.29 per day. This estimate does not include statutory benefit costs (EI, CPP, EHT, WSIB premiums), which would add result in an additional cost of approximately \$19.78 per worker per day.

Similarly, of the 1,971 individuals who reported a significant incident of physical violence in the 2018-2019 school year, 553 individuals (28%) reported taking time off work. The mean number of days off work was 5.47 (SD=7.32). Using the same per diem rate of \$185.29, the average cost associated with hiring a replacement for each of these individuals is \$1,013.57 (per incident).

Here again, we see that the impact of harassment and physical violence are equitable. Not only, as we saw above, are both harassment and violence associated with diminished mental health, physical health, and performance at work, but the financial costs of both are comparable. Indeed, these results suggest that about one in three classroom-based workers and school support staff who experience harassment or verbal violence and one in four who experience physical violence will take some time off work.

Not all classroom-based workers and school support staff workers who take time off work will be replaced during an absence. Still, these costs are considerable when extrapolated across the entire workforce of classroom-based and school support workers in the province of Ontario. In our survey, 70% of respondents reported that they experienced one or more incidents of violence and 72% reported that they experienced one or more incidents of harassment. While these rates may be higher than the actual rate in the entire population of workers, given that participants were not randomly selected, even if a low rate of harassment and violence is assumed, for example 10% (which is *less than one fifth of the rate reported in this survey*), that would still involve some 10,000 classroom-based workers and school support staff in any given year. If we assume that 30% of those take time off, then 3,000 classroom-based workers and school support staff would be expected to take an average of 6.34 days off work at a cost of \$1,175.12 each amounting to over \$3.5 million dollars annually. It is important to keep in mind that this estimates a very low rate of exposure to harassment and violence and estimates only the costs associated with a *single* incident in any given year.

#### 2.5 Personal costs

Survey respondents were asked to describe the impact harassment and violence has on their personal and professional lives. This open-ended question was intended to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on the effect of workplace harassment and violence as a whole rather than in relation to a single incident. Responses were coded and analyzed both quantitively and qualitatively. Overall, the findings suggest that workplace violence and harassment has significant impacts on the lives of education sector workers. This result was particularly striking for educational assistants, early childhood educators, and others working in the classroom – 87% indicated it had a substantial (and often multifaceted) impact, although this was also the case for 75% clerical, ATV/IT, and maintenance workers.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Work-life Balance**

Exhaustion was the most commonly noted impact for classroom-based workers; indeed, almost one in three (29%) participants spoke of "extreme fatigue," "feeling tired," "drained," "worn out," or simply being "emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted." In real terms, these workers' ability to engage in social activities is diminished as a result: "I come home so exhausted from trying to keep one step ahead and making sure the kids that I work with get what they need and that their behaviors do not escalate." Importantly, lack of energy interacts with other workplace impacts to further undermine workers' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Here we can think, for example, of workers who do "not feel safe in any surroundings," or who are "embarrassed to go out in public with bruises and marks" or who are "very skittish and constantly on guard anticipating that every quick movement around me is someone trying to strike at me." And, of course, these effects are exponential – a lack of social interactions results in increased isolation and poorer mental health. Importantly, the ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance is further undermined by a lack of funds which not only restrict the leisure activities that can be purchased and therefore pursued but also means many educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support workers juggle both familial responsibilities and second jobs: "Making less than 45,000 a year does not reflect the work I do. This causes stress and anxiety. Every educational assistant I work with is a woman. Every one of us have second and third jobs. We are tired. We are broken. We take the abuse because we are too tired to expect better."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Subsequent rates in this section exclude participants who indicated the workplace had no impact on their personal or professional lives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Only 7% of school support staff noted exhaustion or fatigue; note that the rate, across groups, was higher from women than for men.

#### **Family Life**

One participant, a clerical worker, noted that: "What employees experience in the workplace always comes home with them in some form or another and plays out in a variety of ways on his/her psyche which inevitably affects one's personal life." It is important to note that the way 'routine' harassment and violence ripples into familiar relationships, the lives of workers' partners, and – most especially – their children, emerged as a distinctly gendered impact of workplace harassment and violence – noted by 24% or almost one in four women, but only one in ten men.

At the end of the workday, I am beyond exhausted. While at work I am constantly in a state of hyper vigilance staying a step ahead of the students to make sure I and they are safe. I have no energy for my own family. I do not go out with friends. (EA)

The impacts on family life were diverse. Many participants wrote about coming home not only "mentally and physically drained" but also "grumpy," "impatient," "short tempered," "irritable," "stressed," and "bitchy." Many

participants noted that they "bring the stress home," some "withdraw from the family," while others find "it hard to come home and receive a hug from my spouse, or my kids." Indeed, one educational assistant wrote that she "would flinch when my own child came near me suddenly." However, the overwhelming finding was that these workers are, with disconcerting frequency, too sore or too tired "to do activities with my children," distracted, and therefore "not able to give my children my full attention," and so emotionally depleted that they are "easily irritated with my small children at home." This educational assistant described how this plays out: "My tolerance is low when [my children] cry, or whine. I tend to yell

I have nothing left for my family. I don't feel like engaging with them because of the extremely difficult days of violence and dysregulation in the children that I support. IT IS EXHAUSTING!! I am mentally done! I'm not sure how much longer I can do this job, and I'm only 35. I hate that I have nothing left to give to my own children and husband. My patience is shot, and I just want to be left alone. Its a horrible feeling. (EA)

at them, which I then later regret." Another explained, "I keep it together at school. I am always the perfect EA. At home, I am low on patience; my kids don't get the best [of] me. And I am too tired for a personal life.'

Finally, work life spills into personal life when mental injury derails a relationship ("I am going through a divorce due to PTSD from workplace violence causing flashbacks") or, more commonly, when tensions emerge because partners are frustrated with the time spent preparing for the coming work day or recovering from the previous one. Tensions also emerge because partners are irritated by "me coming home hurt and nothing being done," or angered "by jokes about him causing [bruises]." The following quotation by an EA captures many of the themes discussed above:

"I once had a black eye from a student. On the weekends when I was out with my family people saw me and assumed my husband was harming me. For the month it took for the swelling and colouring to go down, my husband would not go out in public with me. And I hid at home because people gave me looks and one person even approached me to tell me I was a bad mom for allowing my children near someone who would hurt me. That month was a huge strain on my family. But on a day-by-day level I find I bring a lot of my work home with me in the form of emotions. If my students have had a particularly hard day I shamefully find that I don't have patience for my own kids at the end of the day, and this puts a strain on my relationship with my own children."

# 2.6 Harassment and physical violence have enduring impacts.

As we have already seen, the impact of harassment and physical violence is often similar. Both are associated with diminished mental health, physical health, and performance at work. Subsequent analyses showed that every type of harassment and each type of physical violence was negatively related to overall functioning (i.e., physical health, mental health, and the ability to perform duties at work) months after educators experienced harassment and violence. Specifically, nine different types of harassment and violence, from four different sources (i.e., students, parents, colleagues, and administrators), yielded 36 correlations, all of which were negative, indicating that harassment and physical violence were adversely related to overall functioning; 34 of these correlations were statistically significant. This is an extremely important finding in that it suggests that in terms of impact, some forms of harassment (e.g., put downs) that tend to be frequent, commonplace, and descriptively less severe are as significantly related to health and well-being as descriptively more severe, albeit less frequent, forms of harassment (e.g., false accusations).

### 2.7 Coping

Given the high rates of workplace harassment and violence experienced by classroom-based workers and school support staff, it is vital to reflect on workers' access to services provided by, for example, counsellors and

physiotherapists, as well as the importance of having time to heal from a mental and physical workplace injury. On this topic, participants told us that benefits and sick days are woefully inadequate when considered in relation to need. One educational assistant explained: "We do not have time off and \$300-500 in benefits does not get you very far with a counsellor or physical therapist. And look at what we make. We can not

I stopped doing the things I love like cooking and reading. I would rather stay home, I have stopped working out, I am exhausted, I cry all the time, I've gained weight, I am anxious and on edge all the time, I don't sleep well. (EA)

afford to pay for that. And most of us have a part time or a second full time job so that we can survive while continuing to be in this field. Which also inhibits our ability to seek outside support. We love our jobs. We love our students. But we need support!" Absent such supports, the question becomes, how do these workers cope with workplace harassment and violence? It is to that question we now turn.

#### Navigating the impact of violence and harassment: coping in the absence of support

Survey participants were asked how they coped with workplace harassment and violence and how they endeavoured to mitigate its impact on their personal and professional lives. While some respondents were incredulous, telling us that they "don't have any [coping strategies]" and a number noted that crying, while not a strategy per se, did relieve tension, "I cry. I go to the bathroom and cry. I go home and cry" others were

There are no strategies. If you take time off work you are questioned. If you report the violence the fix is protective equipment. (EA)

fatalistic: "I haven't come up with a coping strategy that's worked so I just pray and hope the next day is better." That said, as we examine below, education sector workers mobilized on a range of personal and professional resources as they endeavoured to cope with the workplace violence to which they were subjected.

#### Workplace tactics and the importance of debriefs.

Unsurprisingly, workers spoke of drawing on their professional skills (e.g., conflict management, relationship

building) and training (e.g., NVCI, BMS), going for walks, deep breathing, or "taking a break," which, in the context of high demand can necessitate squeezing in time to recentre: "I often find myself taking a minute to take a quick walk. Since I am always on the floor and have limited break times, I take even a small walk to the bathroom to breathe, splash water on my face, or sit and do some quick breathing techniques." Some participants use confrontation, while others, whose jobs allow this tactic (e.g., clerical and maintenance workers), practice

It's not the violence it's the lack of support, being punished when you ask for a break because emotionally you cannot continue, and your principal doesn't care. Knowing you are replaceable if you don't keep going even though *you have had enough.* (EA)

avoidance: "I stay behind my desk and out of the way." Others spoke of the importance of self-talk and reminding themselves about the students' challenges and that "it's not personal."

However, by far the most common tactic noted – one that was identified by almost one in three participants (32%) – was debriefing with colleagues (and sometimes administrators, although all too often participants noted that "debriefs [with the principal] never really happen after a violent incident"). Participants wrote of the importance of "talking to coworkers," sharing experiences, and "discussing incidents that have taken place." These debriefs are more than opportunities to vent (although they are that as well); they are also mechanisms to get advice ("talk to co-workers after the incident and get different perspectives of what could be done differently and what worked well"). Perhaps equally importantly, debriefs are a way to receive emotional support from colleagues who "understand the job." Several participants noted that the debrief meant, "I don't take any work baggage home." Unfortunately, at times, workplace demands and other institutional or interpersonal constraints undermine workers' ability to debrief with trusted coworkers. For example, when mandatory breaks are not given because of staff shortages, workers are denied these moments of collegial support: "I just keep going. Have to ignore as there is no time to debrief."

#### Personal strategies

Participants also identified personal strategies. The four most frequently noted, in descending order, were exercise and self-care, turning to friends and/or family for support, therapy and/or medication, and taking a temporary or permanent leave.

- The most commonly identified strategy (identified by 29% of participants) was exercise (e.g., sports, yoga) and self-care. In this context, self-care, often framed as "taking me time," included a range of activities including "massages," "going for a walk," "meditation," "yoga," "reading," "journaling," "being in nature," "baths," and simply "spending quiet time to decompress." Importantly, as we saw above, education workers report high levels of exhaustion and often need to work second (and sometimes third) jobs to make ends meet this context undermines their ability to proactively implement coping strategies: "I have tied yoga but can't find the time to squeeze it in and am too exhausted when I do have the time."
- Turning to friends and family for support was noted by 12% of participants. These workers might "speak with family about any incidents, to get them sorted and put into perspective" or "vent to my spouse." While evidently an important strategy, workers' ability to draw on the support of friends and family is undermined not only by concerns about confidentiality, but also by the inability of loved ones to understand the nature of the workplace challenges in the education sector: "It can weigh heavily on me some days and people in my personal life that aren't educators do not understand the emotional and mental turmoil I go through sometimes. They just say, 'I don't know how you do it'." Another participant wrote, "it takes a special person to do what you do. Nobody really understands but colleagues and there is no time to really connect and debrief with them about matters. We are stretched so thin. It's go-go-go all day."
- Therapy and/or medication ranging from antidepressants, to anti-anxiety medication, sleep aids, and counselling was explicitly identified by 8.5% of participants. As previously noted, a number of participants told us that their ability to access mental health supports were restricted. One wrote "therapy was very helpful. But cannot afford it outside of the five sessions the board provides," while another pointed out that access is even more restricted for casual employees who, in most cases, are not eligible for workplace benefits: "If contracts and casual employees were given benefits, I would seek counselling."
- Short or long term or even permanent leaves were the fourth most identified strategy. Most often this entailed "the use of sick days as mental health days," "stress leave," and "mental health leave due to my health being compromised and being diagnosed with depression and anxiety." It also included workers who changed jobs, abandoned their careers, or retired early: "I felt unsure of being able to protect myself and my vulnerable knee, so I retired. It was a mental change I was not sure I was ready for. I loved my job, I would have preferred to work a couple more years but I felt unsure about keeping myself safe. So, I retired, I miss my job. Cried for hours about my decision but did it for my physical safety." Evidently, not only are there direct financial costs (as we saw on pages 16 and 17) related to leaves but when highly skilled and experienced professionals are forced to abandon their careers for their mental and/or physical health, the education system as a whole is impoverished.

Not all strategies deployed were positive. A significant minority of participants identified potentially unhealthy tactics. For example, they wrote about turning to binging and over-eating ("I eat too much and all the wrong foods"), excessive sleeping, routinely "zoning out" by watching copious amounts of television, and drugs and alcohol: "I go home and drink a lot of wine. Unfortunately, this is my daily routine which I feel is the only way I can handle my stress." Another participant noted, speaking to constraints as well as strategies, "My EA pay is so poor that I have to work two other jobs to pay for my life. I drink a bit and use pot to settle everyday after school."

While self-evident, it is nonetheless worth noting that no one should find themselves routinely over-consuming food or alcohol or drugs to cope with the trauma of a job, nor should people be obliged to retire early or abandon a career to safeguard their mental or physical health, nor should they have to "pursue self-care activities at my own expense in order to be able to show up the next day at work." Thinking about these strategies reminds us that there are significant costs (both obvious and obscured) of the violence and harassment to which classroom-based workers and school support staff are 'routinely' subjected. These costs ripple through the lives of workers and through the social fabric. Here we can think, for example, what the loss of trained educational sector workers means to students and families – most especially those with complex needs.

# 3. Context: Age and incivility

"There is no respect in the schools anymore from the students and that is very scary!" (EA)

The experience of harassment and violence among classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance) is extremely heterogeneous. Educational assistants can spend long periods of time working with a small number of students. In contrast, school support workers, such as clerical staff, may see large numbers of students but only for brief periods of time. Further, the type and frequency of harassment and violence by students in elementary school is likely to be very different from the type and frequency of harassment and violence by students in high school. A full understanding of the nature and impact of harassment and violence will require a more fine-grained investigation.

Classroom-based workers and school support staff rarely work with just one age group, although some may spend more time with certain age groups than others. To account for the considerable differences among participants with respect to who they work with, we asked all participants to estimate the amount of time they spend working with students in different grades. Results of analyses examining the relationship between the total amount of harassment and violence and the amount of time spent with students in different grades are presented in Table 4. The data indicate that total amounts of violence and harassment increases when classroom-based workers and school support staff spend greater amounts of time with students in Grades 4 to 8. Results also show that the total amount of violence *increases* with the amount of time spent with students in Grades K to 3, but that total amount of harassment *decreases* with the amount of time spent with students in Grades K to 3. These data indicate that more time spent with students in Grades K to 8 means more physical violence but less harassment. In contrast, more time spend with students in Grades 4 to 8 was related to both more harassment and more physical violence.

Moreover, the research demonstrates that levels of disrespect and incivility in the classroom are positively associated with the total amount of harassment, verbal violence, and physical violence experienced by classroom-based workers and school support staff. In addition to reporting experiences of harassment and violence, participants were also asked to report on the level of incivility among students in their schools, regardless of whether they personally experienced any harassment and/or violence. These questions were designed to evaluate the general school environment in which specific instances of harassment and/or violence are experienced by educators. Results, presented in Table 4, show that the total amount of harassment and physical violence experienced by individual classroom-based workers and school support staff is positively correlated with overall levels of student disrespect and incivility; this finding is consistent with existing scholarship (e.g., Huang, Eddy, & Camp, 2017; Seepage et al., 2013). Our results not only speak to the importance of contextualizing harassment and violence but have important implications for how violence is addressed. Reducing student incivility may mitigate the frequency of harassment and violence against workers in the education sector. This suggests an additional point of intervention that does not rely entirely on curtailing the behaviour of students who are verbally or physically violent at the same time as it raises the possibility that failing to address levels of incivility among students may hamper the effectiveness of other interventions.

Table 4: Relationship between health, well-being and the amount of harassment and violence

	Total amount of harassment and verbal violence	Total amount of physical violence
School context - Total amount of disrespect, gang activity and theft	0.39***	0.35***
School context – Degree of disrespect and incivility	0.28***	0.42***
School context – Degree of gang-related behaviour	0.21***	0.01
School context – Degree of theft	0.38***	0.28***

Note: \*\*\* p < 0.0001; \*\* p < 0.001

# 4: Responses and reporting

"Why does the board 'normalize' these incidents? There's NOTHING NORMAL about going to work every day and getting hit, scratched, kicked, punched, pushed, and having your hair pulled." (EA)

### 4.1 Reporting harassment and violence

#### Why not report harassment?

Participants indicated a number of reasons for not telling an administrator about the harassment they experienced. These included: that it was too minor (13.37%), they could handle it on their own (15.07%), they lacked the time due

to routine workplace demands (8.02%), or they were embarrassed/did not want the administrator to know (5.78%). They also reported that talking to their administrator was not helpful (17.42%), and that they were uncomfortable talking about these kinds of incidents with their administrator (14.34%).

The administrator at the time made me feel belittled because of my age. I did not feel supported or comfortable going to admin. (Clerical Worker)

#### Why not report physical violence?

Reporting physical violence is mandated under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* of Ontario. Indeed, there has been a concerted effort on the part of unions representing educational workers to encourage their members to document workplace violence. Over two thirds (67%) of respondents completed a Safe School, Workplace Violence, or Violent Incident Report for their worst incident of workplace violence. The principal reasons indicated in the pre-existing list for not filling out a form were that the participant judged it to too minor to report (20.92%), lacked time because of either routine workplace demands (18.9%) or because they had to cope with the fallout from the incident (9.31%), were discouraged by the principal or vice-principal (6.59%), and were afraid of either career repercussions (5.87%) or of being criticized or punished (5.30%).

### 4.2 Administrative and Institutional Response to Violence and Harassment

When asked about the administrative response to violence, some respondents wrote about their "very supportive admin," describing principals who are "responsive," who consistently "check in" and follow up with debriefs, aid when called upon, ensure "proper first aid is always administered," and help with documenting incidents. Others explained that administrators were at least somewhat supportive and acknowledged the constraints administrators navigate (e.g., lack of human resources, budgetary restrictions). More commonly, however, participants described inaction, normalization, blame, and even reprisals.

#### All too often nothing is done

Many participants explained that their administrators provided minimal or no support – not even debriefs or checkins: "I do not feel supported when I get hit. We have no recourse or protection." When classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance)

described the institutional response to harassment, most stated that little action was taken. For example, of the survey participants who experienced at least one incident of harassment, only 15% indicated that it was resolved in an appropriate and effective manner, 42% specified that it was not resolved, and an additional 42% reported that it was somewhat resolved. Notably (and perhaps tellingly), almost 70% of respondents indicated that they did mention the incident to an

I have brought the issues to my administrator who is aware of the environment that I work in but does NOTHING to improve that environment. It's like talking to a brick wall. (EA)

administrator or supervisor, but that they felt "brushed off," that the behaviour was ignored or that there was a lack of serious consequences. One respondent wrote: "The response was pretty much to sweep it under the rug. The staff did not handle the response correctly. The admin knew about the incident but did nothing about it."

#### Normalization and blame

Participants wrote that many administrators normalize violence as "part of the everyday job" and tell education workers "that it is [their] job to put up with students' behaviours and assaults" explaining that violence is something

they simply have to "deal with." Respondents also wrote about administrators who negated the violence ("it's a kindergartener how hard can they hit!!") and dismiss the harm and trauma engendered by workplace violence. For example, one educational assistant was belittled for crying after a particularly

You ask for help or speak to admin only a few times; then you just stop. They are not helpful and ask, "what did you do to set him off." (ECE)

intense and prolonged violent incident: "both administrators spoke to me separately and told me that I needed to be more professional."

Participants also reported being blamed for the violence they experienced. For example, one wrote about "being asked what I did to provoke the student," another was "questioned as to what I could have done differently," and a third was

told, "it was my fault when the student attacked me." Moreover, participants wrote about administrators who seemed aggrieved when support was sought or when violence was reported and either subtly or explicitly discouraged the practice. One respondent was told, "if you were unable to deal with the behavior that we will find other staff to do the job."

If you are too vocal about needing support your given "that" reputation. Everyone wants us to do our "jobs" and shut up. (EA)

Importantly, the negation of violence, denial of harm, ascription of blame, deployment of punitive measures ("we felt consequenced for the incidents"), and the potential removal of employment are significant disincentives for seeking assistance.

### 4.3 Reprisals and reprimands for reporting harassment or violence

Workplace retaliation is any negative response against an employee who was engaging in a legally protected activity (e.g., refusing to provide unsafe work, requesting adherence to occupational health and safety laws, reporting occupational health and safety violations). One in ten educators (10.89%) reported experiencing a reprisal in relation to their worst instance of harassment and one in fifteen (6.27%) in the case of physical violence in the 2018-2019 school year. The high rates of 'prefer not to answer' responses (11.96% and 8.20%, respectively) are also worth noting.

The most common reprisal from reporting harassment or violence was professional and career costs, which most frequently included changes to job duties, being removed from roles, assigned undesirable tasks, being given bad

references ("the principal gave a bad reference so that I would not be able to become a permanent employee with the board"), and involuntary reassignments. One respondent, an educational assistant, described her experience after she reported harassment: "[I was] moved from a classroom where I had developed relationships with students to a new room. Other educational assistants had to be shuffled as a result and I faced a lot of accusations, ridicule, and blame from them." Notably,

Punishment [including] being excluded from class trips, from events at the school, having to show up to work earlier than other employees, shunned by principals and ignored unless they needed to address something. Letter written in my HR file. (EA)

this form of retribution impacts not only the worker but also the students who are deprived of a trusted educator.

Survey respondents also described being reprimanded either verbally or in writing. Reprimands, at times, resulted in serious professional costs when written reprimands become permanent in workers' files: "I was unfairly written up by the principal with no warning, no meeting, not anything! The warning was kept in my file." Finally, classroom-based workers and school support staff also detail experiences of being isolated from their colleagues during the workday, knowingly being the subject of rumours, and being excluded from important day-to-day communication at work, all of which creates, or contributes to, a toxic work environment.

I was punched in the head resulting in a concussion and prolonged brain injury that I'm still suffering from. I tried to explain to my principal that I was experiencing anxiety due to the extreme violence. He told me that it was my job to manage the behaviour of the students and I'd better figure it out. When I started to cry, he said I needed to behave professionally. I was scared to work with the student alone. I was written up for unprofessional behaviour. After that I experienced daily panic attacks and lived in fear. I worked in absolute terror as the principal said three write-ups and I'd lose my job. Eventually I was having panic attacks in class. I had to go on leave and into intense therapy for PTSD. My life will never be the same. (EA)

# 5: Designated groups: Vulnerability, experiences, and response

"It is hard to really get a feel for someone yelling in your face, 'You are a son of a n\*\*\* bitch'." (EA)

Results of the survey show that classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance) experience high rates of harassment and violence and that many experience multiple instances within a single school year. However, the frequency of harassment and violence is highly variable, with some workers experiencing none or just one or two incidents over the year and others experiencing more than 20 in a single year. In this section of the report, we supplement the quantitative data with qualitative findings in order to examine the extent to which vulnerability to harassment and violence is conditioned by intersecting factors. The *Employment Equity Act* defines women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities as designated groups. In this section, we examine how gender, disability, and racialization (the small sample size necessitated collapsing racialized and Indigenous participants into the broader category of BIPOC) impacts vulnerability to, the experience of, and interpersonal/institutional response to workplace harassment and violence in our sample.

#### 5.1 Women

Classroom-based workers and school support staff are predominantly women; indeed, 70% of CUPE Education Workers (Ontario) are women, and our rates in this survey were even higher. Of the 3868 individuals who participated in the survey, 88% identified as women. Results of our analyses, depicted in Figures 6a and 6b, showed that women participants reported higher levels of harassment from students and parents, as well as higher levels of violence from students. That women workers in the education sector are disproportionately experiencing violence is consistent with the previously noted findings of Cynthia Chen and her colleagues (2019). These authors, based on their longitudinal study of WSIB claims between 2002 and 2015, concluded: "Increases in rates of violence (as assessed by workers' compensation claims) were observed for both men and women in the education sector, increases were stronger among female workers than among male workers with the relative risk of workplace violence for women (compared with men) being at least fivefold for the second half of the study time period" (p. 6) (see also Santor, Bruckert, & McBride, 2019). Importantly, gender is not only implicated in rates but also conditions the nature and impact of workplace harassment and violence. We have already seen that harassment is gendered when denigrating language is deployed (e.g., "bitch," "cunt") or when sexist remarks are deployed (e.g., "the administrator made a comment about expenses saying because I was a woman I was 'spending money") or when women workers are routinely "disrespected" or "belittled" by colleagues, administrators, or parents based on gender ("I had a co-worker, another EA, in front of students and other co-workers make comments about me being menopausal and how sex would be awkward").

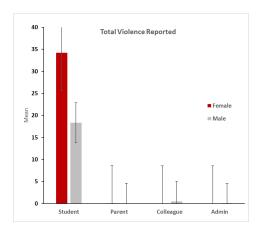


Figure 6a: Mean frequency of total harassment from students and parents was significantly higher in female educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support staff than in male participants.

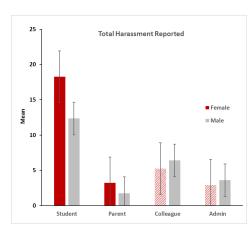


Figure 6b: Mean frequency of total violence from students and colleagues was significantly higher in female educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support staff than in male participants.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Perhaps counterintuitively, when examining the frequency that participants experienced a reprisal for reporting and instance of harassment or violence, our analyses showed that significantly ( $\chi^2$ =9.34, p < .002) more male participants (20%) reported experiencing a reprisal for reporting an instance of harassment than did female participants (12%).

We can also consider that women workers, in general, experience higher levels of workplace sexual harassment than do their male colleagues (Hango & Moyser, 2018). Participants in this survey described a range of behaviour by administrators and colleagues that meets the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of sexual harassment: "Engaging

in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought to be known to be unwelcome" (10(1)(e)); behaviour that is based on an individual's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For example, one wrote about her administrator greeting her with "hi sexy girl," many described unwelcome and persistent invitations to activities, drinks, and in one case "skinny dipping." Participants described being destabilized by inappropriate looks, gestures, "comments steeped in double entendre," being "smacked in the

While blocking one student from attacking peers, who he threatened to kill, he grabbed both my breasts extremely hard [...]. I was very sore and was expected to continue working with him without any consequences or even an apology. Almost like nothing even happened. (EA)

butt as I walked by," and having their attire and body commented upon. Participants also described sexual harassment from students: "I was sexually harassed by a male student in grade 8. He drew photos that depicted me in a sexual manner, made several comments about my body, my clothing, posted online that I was a prostitute and a slut."

Several gender differences also emerged with respect to the impact of harassment and violence. In this report, we have already seen that, compared to their male counterparts, women report more overtime work, higher workload increases, less ability to meet workplace demands, and greater familiar impacts. As we see in Figure 7, female classroom-based workers and school support staff, represented with a solid red bar, reported lower levels of functioning and lower levels of commitment than male workers and staff, represented with the solid gray bar. Female participants also reported higher levels of workplace burnout and more symptoms of PTSD following their worse instance of harassment than men. Interestingly, no gender differences were observed with respect to the number of days taken off work following the worst instance of harassment or violence.

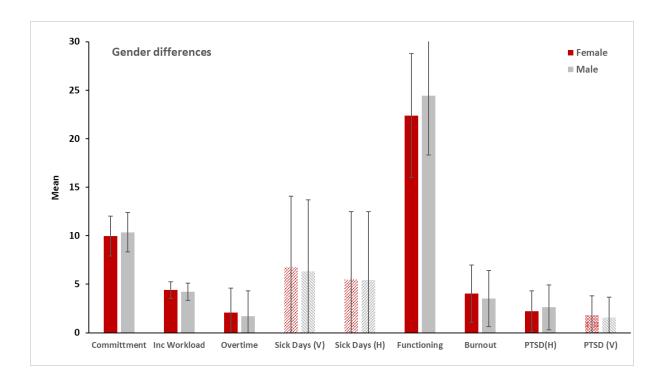


Figure 7: Mean scores for men and women on a variety of measures of impact. Significant group differences are depicted with solid bars. No differences were observed for mean number of sick days following an instance of harassment or severity of PTSD symptoms following an instance of violence.

### 5.2 Individuals who identify as having a disability

Of the 3868 individuals who participated in the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey, 6.5% identified as having a disability. Results of our analyses, depicted in Figure 8, showed while no statistically significant differences were found in the frequency of harassment or physical violence from students or parents, participants identifying as having a disability reported significantly higher levels of harassment from colleagues and administrators. Turning to the qualitative data, we see that workers who identify as having a disability

described being disbelieved, disrespected, and humiliated about their disability by colleagues and administrators. One reported that she was "teased about [her] inability to hear," another wrote of overhearing "staff saying that I was every principal's worst nightmare – staff who are at work who can't do their jobs," and a third reported that upon her return to work following a two week mental health leave she was "harassed"

My administrator laughed at me as I tried to run to my 5th CPI [non-violent crisis intervention] call while wearing 2 supportive knee braces. I asked for his assistance and he laughed and walked away. (EA)

by a principal about the reason for the leave even though it was supported by medical documentation." Notably, workers experience bias and ableism even when the disability was the result of physical and/or mental injuries sustained in the workplace. One worker told us: "[My] principal ridiculed my anxiety and PTSD from a work-related injury. She laughed about it and spoke to other staff. Complained about accommodating me and caused tension with other staff as their duties changed due to my accommodations." In other words, workers who acquire an injury at work are sometimes subsequently harassed and demeaned because of that injury.

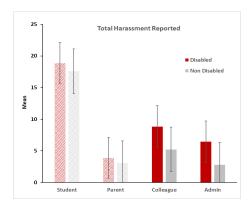


Figure 8: Mean frequency of total harassment from colleagues and administrators was significantly higher in educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support who identify as having a disability than in those who do not.

Given the elevated levels of harassment from administrators noted previously (see page 12), it is perhaps unsurprising that reprisals for reporting harassment is significantly ( $\chi^2$ =19.27, p < .0001) higher for participants who identified as having a disability than it is for those who did not identify as having a disability (see Figure 8 above). Here participants spoke of, for example, being reassigned even when accommodations had been successfully applied in the past. One participant described being given assignments that "did not meet my restrictions. I was put in classes that specifically would further damage my health." Another wrote: "I was also yelled at by a principal in front of others for asking them to recognize and enforce my disability accommodation."

A number of differences also emerged with respect to the impact of harassment and violence. As shown in Figure 9

on page 27, classroom-based workers and school support staff who identify as having a disability reported lower levels of functioning and of commitment and higher levels of burnout and PTSD symptoms following instances of harassment and violence than participants who do not identify as having a disability. Although both groups of individuals report

I considered a change in career because I was made to feel like my disability means I am an unreliable educator. (EA)

increases in workloads and overtime, no significant differences were found with respect to increases in workload or overtime.

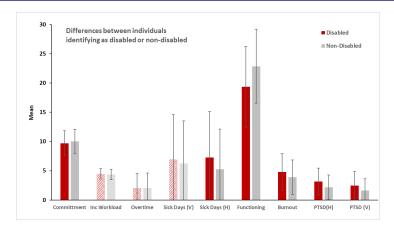


Figure 9: Mean scores for men and women on a variety of measures of impact. Significant group differences are depicted with solid bars. No differences were observed for mean number of sick days following an instance of violence, mean increase in workload or mean increase in overtime.

My admin has asked my teaching partner about my abilities when I am not present and continues to ask me to talk to her about the details. I prefer to preserve my dignity and only share the details with folks who I feel will not hold it against me and the folks who I am with every day so they can help keep me safe in medical emergencies. (ECE)

#### **5.4 BIPOC workers**

Classroom-based workers and school support staff in our sample were predominantly white. Of the individuals who identified their racial identity (12% of respondents preferred not to answer the question), 7.42% of the entire sample of participants identified as belonging to one of a number of racialized groups, including Asian (2.8%), Black (1.8%), Middle Eastern (0.81%) or Latin American (0.7%); only 1.3% of our sample identified as Indigenous. As previously noted, the small sample size necessitated combining these individuals into a single group of BIPOC. Results showed that racialized and non-racialized classroom-based workers and school support staff experience similar levels of harassment and violence from parents, colleagues, and administrators and that the occurrence of violence was rare, but that non-racialized classroom-based workers and school support staff reported higher levels of harassment and violence from students than did racialized individuals.

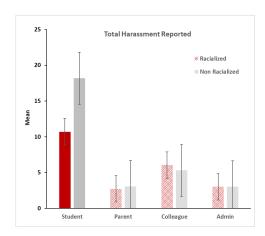


Figure 10a: Mean frequency of total harassment from students and was significantly lower in racialized educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support staff.

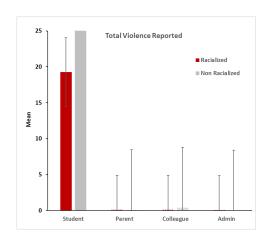


Figure 10b: Mean frequency of total violence from students and was significantly lower in racialized educational assistants, early childhood educators, and school support staff.

We examined a number of factors that may have masked any effects for the group of racialized participants, such as a difference in the age or region in which racialized participants responded to the survey or in the extent to which racialize participants, who reported a slightly lower frequency of harassment and violence, compared to non-racialized participants. Results showed, for example, that frequency of harassment and violence was highest in educational assistants and early childhood educators who work with students in grades 4 to 8 and lower in school support staff who do not work directly with students in the classroom. If, for example, participants in the current study, who are from racialized groups, were also overrepresented in the group of participants who did not work with students in grades 4 to 8 or in the group of participants who serve as support staff to a school and do not work directly with students in the classroom, then overall rates would be lower. Even after accounting for these additional factors, the group differences between racialized and non-racialized participants remained.

These results need to be interpreted with caution. The sample of racialized workers is small and may well not be representative of the experiences of racialized classroom-based workers and school support staff in Ontario. Moreover, quantitative data fails to consider the way bias, racism, and Islamophobia permeate the harassment and violence that workers experience, the way the harassment is rooted in racist tropes, and the extent to which racism informs the nature of the harassment. One participant spoke of overhearing "staff using the term 'n\*\*\*\*\*' in the main office and laughing, stating all of them are lazy and worthless. The principal did not discipline any of the members of the conversation, even though he was privy to the conversation." Another participant's concerns about workplace protocols were not only dismissed, but she was disparaged: "A teacher and I were not in agreement about an issue, and she stated, 'maybe in your culture you like to lie'." One participant wrote, "my teaching partner was telling the all the students to correct my pronunciation which is not wrong but spoken with a Vietnamese accent." One Black EA explained that her ability to challenge policies is undermined by racial stereotypes: "No matter what the situation is I am automatically in the wrong because I'm Black and stereotyped as being aggressive if I disagree with someone." We can also think of the impact of verbal violence that includes racial slurs (e.g., the N-word), the ubiquity of microaggressions, and the targeting of symbols of 'otherness': "A student tried to pull on my hijab from the back chocking while I was engaged in teaching another student. When the teacher tried to get him off, he tried to scratch and bite both her and me. He also tried to insert his hand under my shirt to scratch me." (EA)

Importantly, BIPOC participants experienced higher rates of reprisals for reporting instances of harassment or

violence. Indeed, significantly ( $\chi^2$ =3.78, p=.05) more BIPOC participants (17.92%) experienced a reprisal for reporting an instance of harassment than participants who did not identify as racialized (11.61%). Although more racialized participants (9.00%) reported experiencing a reprisal for reporting an instance of violence than participants identifying as non-racialized (6.08%), this difference was not statistically

significant (see Figure 11). Without further interviews, we do not know why racialized workers are disproportionately

No support from admin instead I was blamed until the truth came out. Even though other staff was speaking out, the principal didn't ask me but blamed me and was surprised when I went

but blamed me and was surprised when I went back to her to explain myself. I guess because I was a casual staff and minority. (EA)

sanctioned for reporting harassment and violence; however, examining other workplaces suggests structural and interpersonal racism as well as implicit bias are factors (see, for example, Lambert & McInturff, 2016).

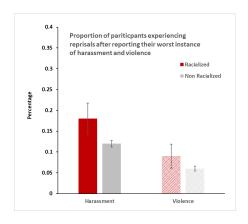


Figure 11: Proportion of racialized and nonracialized participants reporting reprisals following a worst instance of harassment and violence.

A number of group differences also emerged with respect to the impact of harassment and violence (see Figure 12). BIPOC classroom-based and school support staff reported higher levels of commitment and functioning. Surprisingly, while BIPOC participants reported more symptoms of PTSD following their worse instance of harassment and greater increases in overtime relative to non-racialized participants, they also reported lower levels of burnout. No differences between BIPOC and non-BIPOC participants in terms of days off work following an instance of harassment or violence were observed.

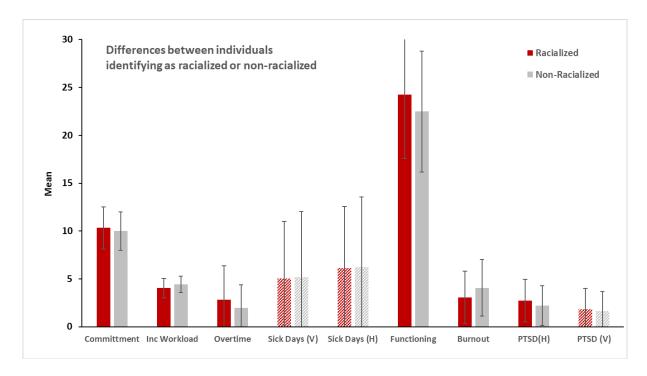


Figure 12: Mean scores for racialized and non-racialized participants on a variety of measures of impact. Significant group differences are depicted with solid bars. No differences were observed for mean number of sick days following an instance of violence or harassment, as well as for mean number of symptoms of PTSD following an instance of violence.

## 5.4 LGBTQ+

Notwithstanding that the LGBTQ+ community is not identified as a designated group in the Employment Equity Act, given the pervasiveness of homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity, it is nonetheless important to consider the experience of sexual and gender minorities. In the current study, 94 individuals identified as LGBTQ+. No significant difference between classroom-based and school support staff who do and do not identify as LGBTQ+ were found. This finding may be attributable to the relatively small number of participants or the fact that sexual orientation or gender identity may not be shared with students, colleagues, administrators, or parents in the workplace. That said, participants did write about their discomfort with homophobic and transphobic statements and the failure of administrators to act. One educational assistant who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community wrote: "A group of students condemned gay people and said they had no business being around, no business adopting children, and that they have a serious mental illness. Other teachers heard this as well. Issue was brought to administration. Nothing was done. In fact, one of the children was actually made valedictorian of the graduating class. I declined attending the graduation because of this incident."

# 6: Comparison of classroom-based and school support workers

"All professionals have skills to bring, and a team approach works best in schools today." (EA)

The 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey involved both classroom-based (i.e., designated early childhood educators, educational assistants, instructors, professional/paraprofessional, library workers, and student supervisors) and school support staff (i.e., clerical/admin, custodial/caretaking/cleaning, food service worker, IT/AV support, maintenance/trade, and warehouse/driver). In this section, we report the results of analyses that compared the frequency of harassment and violence experienced by these two sets of workers. However, because many workers hold more than one position, any direct comparison was difficult. To facilitate the comparison, we removed any participant who did not belong exclusively to one of these two groups. Accordingly, 2960 participants were included in the support staff group.

### 6.1 Frequency of harassment and violence

Results of analyses comparing classroom-based versus school support staff participants are presented below in Figure 13. These results show that classroom-based participants report more frequent harassment from students than do school support staff. However, results also show that support staff report higher levels of harassment from parents and administrators than do classroom-based participants.

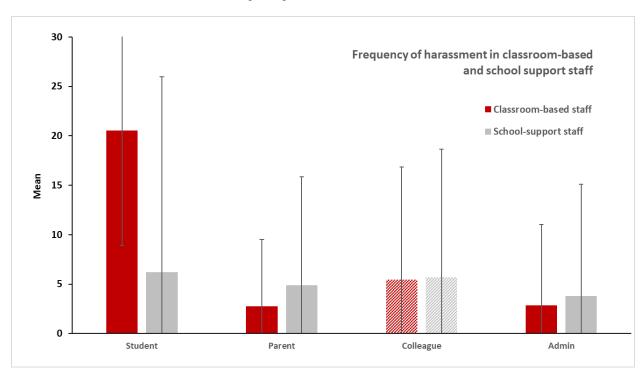


Figure 13: Frequency of harassment and physical violence reported by classroom-based versus school support staff participants from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

Results of analyses examining the frequency of violence reported among both classroom-based participants and school support staff are reported in Figure 14. These findings show that classroom-based workers reported more violence from students than did school support participants, but that school support staff reported significantly more violence from colleagues than classroom-based participants. It is worth noting that although more violence from parents and administrators was reported by support staff than classroom-based participants, these differences were not statistically significant due in part to the small number of participants reporting violence from parents, colleagues, and administrators.

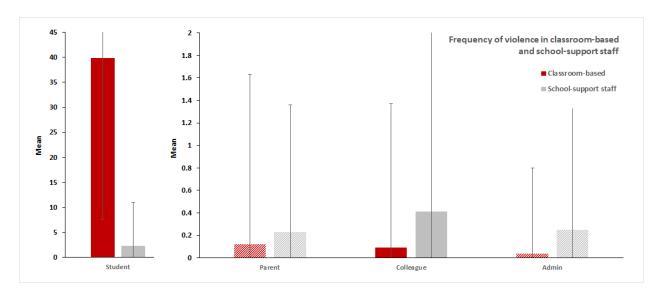


Figure 14: Frequency of harassment and physical violence reported by classroom-based versus support staff from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

# 6.2 Functioning of classroom-based workers and support staff

We also compared the frequency of symptoms of PTSD and burnout between classroom-based workers and support staff, as well as differences between the two groups of participants with respect to overall functioning, commitment, workload increases, and the number of days off due to their worst incident of harassment and violence. Results are presented in Table 5. In general, classroom-based participants reported a greater number of PTSD symptoms following their worst instance of harassment and a greater number of burnout symptoms than did support staff. Classroom-based participants also reported greater increases in workloads and overtime than did support staff. No differences were found with respect to the number of days taken off work following their worst instance of harassment or violence and there was no difference in the severity of PTSD symptoms following their worst instance of violence.

Table 5: Levels of functioning in classroom-based versus school-support workers

	Classroom-based workers				School-support workers			
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t	p
Overall functioning	2757	3.78	2.39	615	5.27	0.10	13.96	.0001
Commitment	2259	9.96	2.03	547	10.20	2.15	2.50	.01
Burnout	2243	4.13	2.91	537	3.43	3.08	4.75	.0001
PTSD Symptoms following violence	1721	1.69	2.02	134	1.99	2.26	1.66	ns
PTSD Symptoms following harassment	1805	2.24	2.09	310	2.51	2.16	2.09	.04
Not Meeting Demands	2258	2.27	1.07	547	1.94	1.06	6.48	.0001
Increased Workloads	2092	4.42	0.87	493	4.27	0.91	3.35	.001
Overtime	2257	2.07	2.55	547	1.73	2.44	2.84	.01
Days off due to harassment	562	6.41	7.38	84	5.60	6.51	0.95	ns
Days off due to violence	482	5.28	6.81	29	6.97	8.29	1.28	ns

# 7. Readiness and training

"We don't have the qualifications or the tools to deal with the situations we deal with on a day-to-day basis." (EA)

#### Readiness

In the 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey, we asked participants about with their level of preparedness in dealing the instances of harassment and violence. Results, presented in Figures 15a and 15b, show that over half of participants indicated that they had a little (23.61%) or no training (32.13%) to deal with instances of harassment and that about one third of participants have had a little (13.57%) or no training (30.28%) to deal with instances of violence.

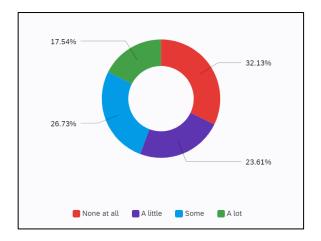


Figure 15a: Percentage of participants who have different degrees of training to deal with instances of harassment.

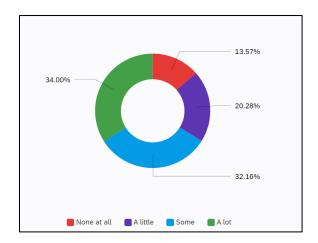


Figure 15b: Percentage of participants who have different degrees of training to deal with instances of violence.

I use all of the training the Board has repeatedly provided. I use it every day. Often, if there is nothing I can do. I report the incident and leave it. I am not listened to, cared for, or protected. After being harmed I am blamed by administration for the subsequent illness. (EA)

#### **Training**

We also surveyed participants with respect to what type of training they had already received and the types of training they would like to acquire. Results are presented in Figure 16, only for participants who indicated that they were classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, early childhood educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, maintenance). Results show that although most classroom-based workers have received many different types of training, including (a) non-physical techniques to manage harassment, (b) non-physical techniques to manage violence, and (c) training and guidance on how to intervene physically, more than 30% of classroom-based workers have not received this kind of training, the majority of which indicated they would like to complete such training.

Results of the survey also showed that almost 50% of classroom-based workers wished to acquire training in how to teach students social-emotional skills (SEL) to manage frustration and anger. Again, almost 60% of participants would like to acquire Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training but have not yet done so. For all types of training, the percentage of participants unaware of the various types of programs was generally small.

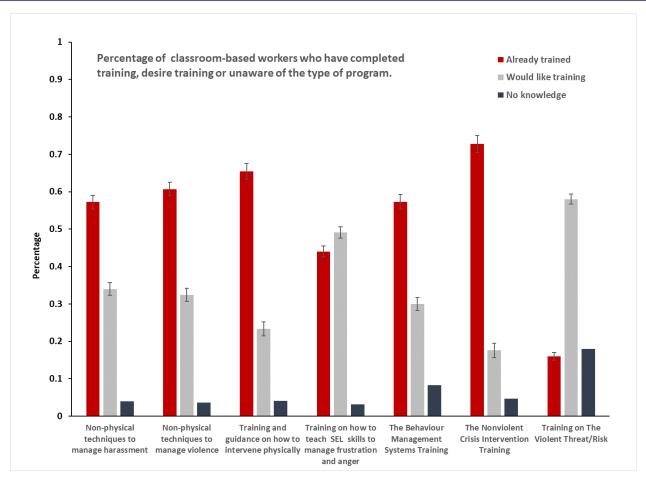


Figure 16: Percentage of participants who already have different types of training or wish to receive different types of training.

Although the level of training and degree of readiness is an important issue to consider in understanding the complexity of the harassment and violence experienced by classroom-based workers and school support staff, no amount of training or readiness will eliminate the frequency of harassment and violence and the impact that harassment and violence has on individuals in the workplace. Indeed, focusing on just the issue of training and readiness would be overly simplistic, ignoring the multitude of social, economic, physical, and mental health issues that affect the likelihood that individual students initiate harmful behaviour. Moreover, a narrative of "more training" risks not only individualizing the complex interlocking issues but also risks obscuring the need to address the systemic factors that are at the root of harassment and violence educators sector workers' experience.

The school board should stop pretending like "more training" is going to fix this. We are made to feel like being abused is our job and its our fault if we get hurt. (EA)

The School Boards need to acknowledge the violence and develop a plan. Having a policy that is NEVER enforced is not working. (EA)

# Conclusion: The inescapability of workplace violence

"Why are we made to feel that it is part of our job to accept violence? I don't see too many jobs around that would accept what we go through." (EA)

The 2018-2019 Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey documents an epidemic of harassment and violence among classroom-based workers (e.g., educational assistants, designated early childhood Educators) and school support staff (e.g., clerical, custodial, IT and maintenance staff) in Ontario's elementary and secondary school system. There are a number of issues that warrant immediate attention.

First, results from the survey suggest that in any single year, as many as 89% of classroom-based and support staff workers will experience an act, attempt or threat of violence and that 95% will experience some form of harassment. These are extraordinarily high rates and are among the highest among any labour market sector. Findings for physical

violence reported in the current study are consistent with rates of workplace violence events reported to and monitored by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). The twenty occupations reporting the greatest number of workplace violence events resulting in time off work due to injury are reported (in Table 6) for 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020.<sup>7</sup> These results show that, in 2014, 2016, and 2018, more instances of physical violence resulting in time off work due to injury were reported to WSIB by teaching assistants in elementary and secondary school than any other group of PSHSA8 sector employees; these rates are also considerably higher than in sectors generally assumed to be dangerous, such as law

I am usually able to de-escalate a situation before it gets out of control. Having said that, I am only able to de-escalate a student or prevent an aggressive episode when the appropriate *supports are put into place. When we [the staff]* are stretched between students then we are unable to provide the support needed to keep students actively engaged, appropriately challenged, and in control of their behaviours.

enforcement and corrections. Only in 2020 (when in-person teaching was restricted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic) did teaching assistants in elementary and secondary school not report the greatest number of instances of physical violence resulting in time off work due to injury (perhaps unsurprisingly, another occupational group of predominantly women workers – nurse's aides and orderlies – had the highest rates in that year).

Table 6: The top twenty highest count of workplace violence events resulting lost time due to injury in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

Occupations		2016	2018	2020
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER ASSISTANTS	273	397	665	318
POLICE OFFICERS (EXCEPT COMMISSIONED)	269	284	354	327
NURSE AIDES AND ORDERLIES	236	279	318	389
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS	197	293	252	177
CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS	145	191	367	169
REGISTERED NURSES	150	158	258	218
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS	87	145	268	123
BUS DRIVERS AND SUBWAY AND OTHER TRANSIT OPERATORS	65	100	168	121
REGISTERED NURSING ASSISTANTS	84	99	48	135
OTHER AIDES AND ASSISTANTS IN SUPPORT OF HEALTH SERVICES	21	16	218	71
AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS AND OTHER PARAMEDICAL OCCUPATIONS	31	50	66	66
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS	25	45	55	29
FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND OTHER RELATED COUNSELLORS	24	34	54	35
SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS	33	30	59	22
SOCIAL WORKERS	12	20	50	46
SECURITY GUARDS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	12	13	47	37
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECON	14	23	37	22
VISITING HOMEMAKERS, HOUSEKEEPERS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	30	30	19	1
BY-LAW ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER REGULATORY OFFICERS, N.E.C.		10	18	10
PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICERS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	17	12	7	6

Data Source: The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Enterprise Information Warehouse (EIW) Claim Cost Analysis Schema, April 2021 data snapshot for all years

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Data provide by Public Services Health & Safety Association: Data Source: The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Enterprise Information Warehouse (EIW) Claim Cost Analysis Schema, April 2021 data snapshot for all years.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Public Service Health and Safety Association

Second, the frequency at which violence and harassment was reported over a single school year was also extremely high. Classroom-based and support staff workers reported an average of 26.51 instances of all types of harassment per year from students and an average of 24.39 instances of acts, attempts or threats of violence. It is worth noting that

the pay classroom-based workers and schools support staff receive does not reflect the workplace risks they navigate. For example, the starting salary for police officers in Ottawa – a job that continues to be male dominated – is \$68,285.86,9 while the starting salary for educational assistants – predominantly women – is roughly half that amount. As a result, educational assistants are not only facing unprecedented levels of harassment and violence but are often obliged to work second

Respect support staff as professionals and pay them a decent salary. Many of us must work two, or more jobs to make ends meet. So you will lose us [...]. My job is not easy, and it is needed. I should make around what a plumber or electrician would make. (EA)

and even third jobs. In real terms this hinders their ability to recuperate and exacerbates personal and social costs. Moreover, speaking to societal costs, low wages combined with adverse working conditions can result in difficulty recruiting and retaining quality staff and ensuring adequate numbers of supply/casual staff.

Third, there is a disturbing normalization of violence against education sector workers by administrators, educators, and students; all too often it appears that violence is increasingly understood to be "part of the job." The impact of the normalization of violence against predominantly women workers on students is, to the best of our knowledge, unresearched, however, educators are certainly raising flags: "We as EA's are victims of violence. And we teach each other – and the children that we work with – to stand silently by and become victims." This normalization operates in conjuncture with widespread minimization and/or denial of the extent of violence and its multifaceted impacts on both classroom-based workers and school support staff.

Fourth, results from the current survey indicate that classroom-based and support staff workers report elevated levels of mental health difficulties, burnout, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder following the experience of harassment and violence, all of which were related to lower levels of overall wellbeing and workplace commitment, as well as greater difficulties meeting job demands and high rates of time off work. Indeed, our findings suggest that 13.5% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of violence in the past year and that 18% of EAs would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of harassment in the past year. The proportion of individuals designated as having PTSD, after one instance of harassment or violence, was equitable to rates reported by firefighters and public safety call centre operators. Results of the survey also indicate that approximately one in six classroom-based workers and school support staff were either at imminent risk of burnout (7.21%) or would meet the formal criteria for burnout (7.86%).

Fifth, the high rates of harassment and violence experienced by classroom-based and support staff workers speak to the need for urgent intervention. The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (CSA Group, 2013) was introduced in Canada in 2013 to address the increasing social and economic costs of mental health difficulties in the workplace. The National Standard defined, for the first time, the characteristics of a healthy workplace and the types of workplace hazards that could be expected to undermine the mental health of employees.

The Standard defined a "psychologically healthy and safe workplace" as one that "promotes workers' psychological wellbeing and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including in negligent, reckless or intentional ways" (CSA Group, 2013, n.p.). The voluntary policy was intended to provide guidance to employers and unions on how to identify, assess, and control psychological hazards in the workplace and on how to foster and promote psychological health and safety amongst employees (CSA Group, 2013). Considering the high rates of harassment and

I have had seven years of intensive psychological therapy (twice a week) due to PTSD brought on by the workplace. I have finally developed functioning coping skills. I remain in this job because it's the highest paying in my field of work although I only make \$40,000 a year. (EA)

violence experienced by classroom-based workers and support staff it is reasonable to expect that most employees are likely to suffer a mental injury of some kind, at some point, during their employment. Given the impact that harassment and violence have on the health and wellbeing, both immediately and over the long-term, adequate resources (e.g., access to mental health professionals) are essential to ensure that all staff who have experienced harassment and violence have the opportunity to address any mental or physical injury that they have sustained, as well as to acquire the skills needed to cope with ongoing exposure to harassment and violence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ottawa Police Service: salary and benefits; https://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/careers-and-opportunities/sworn-salary-and-benefits.aspx

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Studies examining the rate of PTSD in firefighters have found rates of PTSD ranging from 13% to 18% 1–4 years following large-scale response events (Benedek, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2007; Carleton, Afifi, Turner et al., 2012).

Finally, the job that education sector workers – and particularly EAs – are doing has changed dramatically. A truly inclusive education system needs to be able to respond to students' complex needs. This cannot be a "one size fits all" model; the approach must be adaptable and well resourced. Survey respondents explained that demands on their time have increased while resources have dwindled. In the end, professionals who pursued post-secondary studies for a career in education<sup>11</sup> find themselves "putting out fires." In the words of one participant: "Think how you would feel being abused at work when you thought you were going to help children learn." This has, as we have seen in this report, a significant impact on workers. It also means that children who need support but are not disruptive are passed over, while those who are disruptive are not having their needs met either – neither group is getting the assistance that would allow them to thrive. The following quotation by an educational assistant speaks to the tragedy playing out in schools across Ontario:

"I am physically and mentally exhausted. Our workload has become greater and even though there isn't enough support provided by the government, the special needs students are still going to school. A student that is violent doesn't get support, but we are constantly pulled from students who are supposed to get support, to help the students that don't qualify for support. When I started with the school board 19 years ago, a student with Asperger's would get support – not any longer. But they still need help!"

The extraordinarily high rates and frequency of violence experienced by classroom-based workers warrants immediate but careful consideration. The results of this study indicate that most classroom-based workers and support staff will experience violence and harassment, mostly from the students they are expected to support and educate, during any given year and that for many, the experience of harassment and violence will be repeated throughout the school year. The experience of violence is, in our view, increasingly a defining feature of this type of work.

Addressing this significant problem will require a commitment to immediate action, including:

- Adequate resources for students: There is a desperate need for adequate resourcing to ensure students are afforded the support they require to meet their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural needs. Accordingly, it is vital that resources to ensure the most vulnerable students are getting appropriate and adequate help. This will require, among other things, augmented health services (e.g., early diagnosis and interventions), additional educational supports (e.g., EAs), and smaller classes to facilitate the individualized attention mandated by the *Education Act*. Moreover, despite the significant aid that EAs and ECEs provide, the benefit of these resources and the effectiveness of these workers may be curtailed or diminished without additional support to students outside of school hours.
- Support for classroom-based and school support staff: Resources are needed to support education sector workers to address their mental and physical health needs in the context of the escalating harassment and violence they are experiencing. Participants in the current study who indicated that they were receiving psychological services mentioned an inadequate level of benefits, often as few as six sessions of treatment, an amount too few to adequately treat mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and far less than what other professions with similar rates of post-traumatic stress disorder can access.
- Additional training: Training is required to ensure that administrators have the skills to adequately address harassment and violence in schools and provide meaningful support to educators who experience harassment and violence. Moreover, the high likelihood that most classroom-based workers will be exposed to frequent harassment and violence as many as 30% report not receiving formal training in a variety of techniques and strategies to manage harassment and violence is an important opportunity to ensure that all classroom-based workers are appropriately equipped to deal with the frequent occurrence of harassment and violence.

I try to focus on keeping staff and students safe. I try not to think of the violence. However, my heart pumps hard, and my body feels numb several times a day. I am certain I cannot work in this environment for too long. (EA)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For example, the Ontario Colleges described the job of educational assistant as "assisting teachers and other classroom staff in carrying out education plans. This may include working with students on their academic studies, assisting children with disabilities or special needs and more."

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