

Provincial & Regional Comparisons

The national sample indicates that administrators in provinces and territories across Canada are experiencing similar concerns. However, there are some regional particularities that speak to the importance of context in understanding changes in principalship.

A range of key areas of concern across Canada



International Comparisons

The recently released Teaching and Learning International Survey (commonly known as TALIS) Results by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reinforce many of this study's conclusions. Though Canadian principals in this current study share global concerns, the top areas of concern derived from each study seem notably different. However, the categories overlap and intersect: school role overload reflects high workload and responsibilities; social media issues call for regulation and policy; and a school's ability to meet diverse student needs is limited by inadequate funding. While the TALIS study and the OECD continue to advance the view that school leadership is one of the most critical factors in supporting in student learning, Canadian principals in our study offered a vision of public education as a community endeavour grounded in trusting relationships - a vision that is many ways at odds with the OECD's preoccupation with efficiency, standardization and a privileging of technology.



Top 3 Concerns from our study

1. School role overload
2. Policy problems related to social media
3. Meeting diverse student needs



Top 3 Concerns from TALIS study

1. Inadequate school budget and resources
2. Government regulation and policy
3. High workload and level of responsibilities in the principal's job

Strategic Foresight to Enhance the Future of School Leadership

Three domains of transformational leadership to ensure equity in a vibrant future for Canadian students:

1. **Thinking ahead:** being bold, visionary and forward-thinking in aspiring to create a great school for all students.
2. **Delivering within:** materially supporting and committing to the goals one sets while avoiding the distractions of "doing business as usual," continually asking, "why do we do things this way?"
3. **Leading across:** principals, teachers and students crossing school and jurisdictional boundaries to learn from each other.

—Adapted from Pasi Sahlberg, Harvard University



PRINCIPALS ASPIRE FOR SCHOOLS IN WHICH



- ▶ parents and educators work in respectful and mutually supportive ways to nurture the social, emotional and cognitive growth of children and youth
- ▶ flexible, local leadership and sufficient funding allow schools to be responsive to the needs of students and their families
- ▶ citizenship is modeled and enacted in local partnerships, formal democratic processes, and globally through understanding and respect for diversity
- ▶ all students are able to transition effectively to the workplace, or to further post-secondary education
- ▶ social services are readily accessible to families in need
- ▶ all students feel safe and valued
- ▶ educators have time during the school day to share professional learning
- ▶ technology is used critically and effectively in teaching and learning, and is accessible to all students

“ In this important pan-Canadian study, the authors set out what is happening to the principalship from sea to sea. Principals are, in many ways, at the centre of a rapidly changing society and the impact it is having on its children.

—Andy Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education, Lynch School of Education, Boston College

“ The report is a call to action—get rid of or blunt the distractors, and position the principal to lead the learning culture of the school and to be a system player connected to other schools and the district.

—Michael Fullan, OC, author of *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*

“ What this report makes clear is that the principalship is a paradox. While it is a nearly impossible job, it is done remarkably well by most practitioners—even though they are usually understaffed and under-resourced—given the demands that are made on them.

—David Berliner, Regents' Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University



THE FUTURE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN CANADA

A NATIONAL RESEARCH STUDY ON THE TRENDS SHAPING THE WORK OF CANADIAN SCHOOL LEADERS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

Strategic foresight as a declaration against fatalism

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) took on an ambitious research project to identify the trends and influences that will shape the work of the principal as school leader and to ascertain the short- and long-term supports that administrators hoped to receive in their ever-shifting roles.

This study aims to support the work of the principal, now and in the future. By glimpsing into the future of the principalship, researchers, policymakers and communities can find ways to support and strengthen it.

To understand how Canada's changing landscapes affect principalship, researchers sought the perspective of school leaders

Five hundred principals contributed their views in focus groups held across Canada. Participants engaged in reflective dialogue using resources such as *Changing Landscapes in Co-creating a Learning Canada* and an accompanying student video.

THE TRENDS AND CRITICAL INFLUENCES SHAPING THE WORK OF CANADIAN PRINCIPALS

1 Diversity of students

- 36% Meeting Diverse Student Needs
- 23% Supporting EAL Students & Families



"Diversity" in the context of this study describes almost endless variations in student needs, including medical conditions, learning disabilities, language learning needs, mental health issues, cultural differences and basic needs. There is no such thing as a "typical" student in the classroom when so many sources of diversity must be taken into account. First and foremost though, respondents saw diversity as an asset and foundational to the future of public education and what it means in the context of Canadian identity. As one respondent concluded, "We don't pick and choose who gets to be counted as part of the 'public' in public education - to me this is *the work*."

2 The changing family

- 28% Fragmented Families
- 22% Unhealthy Home Environments



The instability in the composition of Canadian families can increase the resilience of children and youth; however, administrators suggest that schools are increasingly asked to meet the social, emotional, and basic needs of students who are not having these needs met at home.

3 Teaching & learning conditions

- 43% School Role Overload
- 34% External Demands



Principals frequently characterized the working conditions as stressful. Schools are overloaded with responsibilities, partly due to increasingly stringent accountability measures coupled with a lack of long-term vision for public education.

4 Technology

- 41% Policy Problems via Social Media
- 29% Technology Presents Opportunity



Schools' uptake and management of technology were central concerns in this study. Participants noted workload increase, cyberbullying and digital divides as issues related to technology. Too often technology acquisitions are pushed by vendors without adequate research regarding benefit to student learning and total-cost-of ownership considerations.

5 Economy

- 18% Poor Local Economy
- 18% Growing Disparity



Though some noted broader trends in provincial and federal economics—from the reliance on primary resource extraction to the rapidly changing nature of the labour market—most participants remarked on the economy's impacts on families and on teaching and learning conditions. Across the country growing inequity was seen as the single greatest barrier to student learning.

6 Social & cultural influences

- 24% Negative Impact of Social Values
- 20% Political Economy



Many principals' comments about school communities referred directly or indirectly to shifting social values. Respondents felt one of their biggest challenges is organizing and networking to share ideas and develop strategies to create inclusive school communities.

"We need to find ways to build an inclusive culture, where children's strengths are celebrated and they all are seen as active participants in the school community."

"After twenty years as a principal I appreciate the fact that there will always be a line-up of people outside of my office door—but it is the growing number of bureaucrats, consultants and other 'experts' hovering outside the school yard telling me how to do my job that I find most frustrating."

"The 21st century skills mania that swept up policymakers and the media hasn't turned out to be much more than a shell game."

"Increasing government demands to quantify student achievement forces a school-wide focus on numbers, not learning. The goals are misplaced. We should be raising a generation that is creative and brave, not anxious and compliant."

"The current economic downfall has had a tremendous effect on communities and families. This increases the stress level for families, and also results in challenges to provide needed resources to support children."

SEEKING PREFERRED FUTURES: FIVE WAYS FORWARD FOR CANADIAN PRINCIPALS

1 Teach and learn for diversity

- Use technology to enhance and engage student learning, with a consistent and high-quality technology infrastructure to bridge the digital divide.
- Implement a flexible curriculum.
- Create integrated service models, with support of government.



2 Collaborate & build professional capacities in staff

- Create more time and space during the school day for professional collaboration.
- Establish mentorship programs.
- Encourage professional development.



3 Build family & community relationships

- Engage all to support student learning.
- Introduce wrap-around services, with specialists in school.
- Foster meaningful conversations between schools, parents and students.



4 Promote continuous leadership learning

- Engage in leadership development programs.
- Disseminate information to staff with the support of the district.
- Share promising practices.



5 Use technology for creative learning & good citizenship

- Encourage awareness of what it means to be a citizen in a digital age, with support of policymakers.
- Advocate for a healthy balance between face-to-face and digitally-mediated relationships.

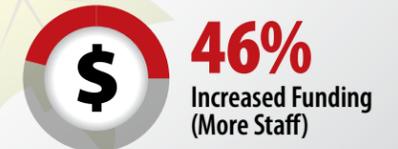
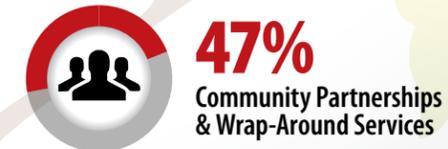


Top Supports Participants Called For

Participants indicated the following as the top needed short- and long-term supports

"To ask principals to be at the front line of educating for diversity, managing accountability systems, mediating technological conflicts, and improving community relations—all while focusing their energies on the improvement of teacher quality and student learning—is to raise expectations to a level that few individuals on their own are likely to be able to meet. With the courage to confront the problems forthrightly and the right calibration of public and professional will to rethink expectations and to redeploy resources, Canada's principals can persevere and even thrive in their indispensable social roles."

—Dennis Shirley, Boston College



SNAPSHOTS OF THE WORK LIFE OF THE CANADIAN PRINCIPAL

- While 90 per cent of principals find their work very fulfilling, 95 per cent report growing, unsustainable workload and complexity in their schools
- An average of a 58 to 60 hour work week is increasingly characterized by business management functions and increased reporting and documentation
- 95 per cent of principals want to spend more time in classrooms working with teachers yet typically only 4.7 hours per week can be committed to instructional leadership activities
- Growing signals regarding the intensification of work: in one province psychiatric disorders account for half of long-term disability leaves among principals
- Growing authority dilemma: increasing expectations to share decision-making and for collaborative school cultures yet accountability ultimately resides with the principal
- The school leader's paradox: be an agent of innovation and transformation while not unsettling those resistant to change

