

# OSBCU Services Survey: Provincial Results



**CUPE**

## INTRODUCTION

Provincial governments have been cutting real per-pupil funding for education regularly since 2011-12. Total funding for school boards has not kept up with inflation or enrolment growth, which has meant a real cut of \$1114 per student in Ontario over that time.<sup>1</sup> Regular and ongoing cuts to education funding has led to a crisis of understaffing, leaving students without services they rely on, and contributing to an increase in violent incidents in schools.

CUPE-OSBCU conducted a survey with CUPE represented school board workers, asking a variety of questions about staffing and services. Province wide, there were over 12,000 CUPE education worker respondents. A full report on the data will be released in the Spring of 2025. CUPE-OSBCU has been releasing results in a series of press conferences and press releases around the province. This report provides some of the most significant results from the survey for the province as a whole.

In 2011-12, government spending on school boards was 19.1% of total government revenue. In 2024-25, spending on education has been reduced to 13.9% of total government revenue. That is to say, there is room in the Ontario Budget to substantially increase spending on education. Had education spending remained at 2011-12 levels (as a proportion of government revenue) there would be \$10.7 billion more in funding to school boards this year.

By any measure, Ontario has the resources to fund schools sufficiently to meet student needs, provide all services and supports to help all students succeed, substantially reduce the number of violent and disruptive incidents in schools, ensure schools meet the highest standards of cleanliness and repair, and provide good, secure, and safe jobs for members of our communities.

[1] In May 2024 the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives calculates the real per-pupil cut at \$1500/student. This calculation uses a different methodology than the \$1114 we use. This is not to discount the CCPA method. Since the release of the CCPA report there has been an update to the Core Education Funding projections (September 2024), which accounts for some of the difference in the calculations.

# SURVEY DATA

## GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR ALL RESPONDENTS

All survey participants were asked a number of questions about their work experience, including questions about workload, violence in the workplace, and about staffing levels in all job classifications at the board. This is a summary of the key findings.

84.1% of respondents say they feel stress due to an excessive workload.

50.9% say they have had to take time off work due to stress and burnout due to excessive workload.

53.5% of members say they do unpaid work for the school board, effectively subsidizing schools to make up for the lack of funding.

Extrapolating the amount of unpaid work reported to the entire membership of these locals, an equivalent of **1355.5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs** worth of unpaid work are done by CUPE members.

30% of respondents say that they are not replaced if they are on leave from their position for any reason. An additional 15.2% say they are replaced, but not on day one. This means that students are going without the supports they deserve, and other workers have to pick up additional work to make the best of an untenable situation.

- 74.6% of respondents say they experience violent or disruptive incidents in their work area. 34.1% of members who experience violent or disruptive incidents say they experience such an incident every day.
- 46.1% of respondents say their work area is sometimes evacuated because of a violent or disruptive incident. 5.9% say an evacuation happens every day.
- 95.8% of EAs/CYWs (Educational Assistants/Child and Youth Workers) experience violent or disruptive incidents in their workplace. 54.8% of EAs/CYWs experience violent incidents every day.
- 73.9% of EAs/CYWs have their work areas (i.e. classrooms) evacuated at least sometimes, 10.5% say it happens every day.

Students and workers are at risk because there are too few staff in schools. This also means students have their learning environments disrupted on a regular basis. This is not conducive to providing students with the highest quality of education that they deserve.

76.3% of respondents say there are not enough people employed in their own job classification at the school board or in their school. 82.8% of respondents said that services for students, staff, or the school community would be improved with more staff in their classification.

72.3% of respondents said there are not enough people in classifications other than their own. 83.4% said that services for students, staff, or the school community would be improved with more staff in job classifications other than their own. **That is to say, that the crisis of understaffing is so widespread, and so apparent, that staff recognize the magnitude of the crisis across the board.**

# JOB CLASSIFICATION SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

## EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS/ CHILD AND YOUTH WORKERS

Educational Assistants and Child and Youth Workers (EA/CYW) provide supports to students with exceptionalities with a diversity of special educational needs. Supports to students with exceptionalities are necessary for them to succeed and participate fully in school. EAs/CYWs have the expertise to provide supports to all students.

72.7% of EAs/CYWs support five or more students in a normal week. That is up from 60% who supported five or more students in a 2018 survey of CUPE EAs/CYWs, indicating a substantial increase in workload for staff and a serious decline in the direct support that can be given to students.

Only 3% of EAs/CYWs said they provide one-on-one support to students. In our 2018 survey we found that 7.4% of members provided one-on-one support to students. Again, this represents a reduction in the level of service provided to students over the past 7 years.

87.3% of respondents said the number of students they support has increased over the past five years.

Only 31.6% of EAs/CYWs reported that they receive paid prep time. Those members without paid prep time still do an average of 20.7 minutes of unpaid preparation time each day.

95% of respondents said there are students at the school(s) at which they work who need the support of an EA or CYW but who do not currently have EA or CYW support.

92.6% reported that they sometimes have to choose between two (or more) students who need their immediate support at the same time.

Large numbers of students are going without the supports they need in order to succeed (or even just to get through the day).

87.8% of EAs/CYWs said they work with students who need one-on-one supports but who are not provided them.

## REGISTERED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS (RECE)

Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), sometimes referred to as Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE) in schools, are co-educators in Ontario's full-day kindergarten program. RECEs are central to the play-based learning that is paired with curriculum-based learning, both of which are essential to students' early development and early learning.

From 2017-18 to 2022-23 (the years for which data is published by the Ministry of Education), the number of kindergarten classes (province wide) without an RECE assigned has increased from 10.8% of all classes with kindergarten students to 14% of such classes.

RECEs are given an insufficient amount of paid prep time. On average, respondents to this survey said they have to do 40.8 minutes of unpaid prep time each day (including those who receive some paid prep time, and those who do not have any paid prep time). RECEs who do not have any paid prep time at all do an average of 42.5 minutes of unpaid prep time per day.

93.2% of RECEs said that there are students in their classes with special educational needs, either formally identified or not yet identified. Of those respondents, 41.6% said that the student does not have an Educational Assistant assigned to support them.

79.5% of RECEs said they are expected to manage the classroom when their teaching partner is instructing the class.

88.9% of RECEs said that at least sometimes they are given the responsibility for managing the entire class (or a majority of the class) while their teaching partner is busy with other tasks. 86.4% of RECEs do not have time each week to do prep work with their teaching partner.

## CUSTODIANS/CARETAKERS/CLEANERS

Custodians, caretakers, and cleaners have responsibilities for daily cleaning of schools, opening schools in the morning and ensuring they are secure at the end of the day. They act as the eyes and ears of the school, know the students and staff, and ensure school safety on a number of fronts.

39.3% say they are sometimes asked to work with inadequate or ineffective supplies or equipment. Survey respondents identified a number of issues, including running out of supplies and not being able to order more, worn out brooms and mops that are not replaced, machines (e.g. floor waxing, vacuum cleaners, etc.) that break down and are not fixed. Members reported that they are told that budgetary constraints are the cause of these problems.

40.6% said there are areas of their school that are not cleaned on a daily basis. Although this is not a majority, a large minority of custodians reporting this leads to serious concerns, especially coming out of a pandemic when intensive cleaning procedures were required to prevent the spread of illness. The most frequently reported areas that went without daily cleaning were:

- Gymnasiums (36.9%)
- Hallways (31.9%)
- Libraries (36.8%)
- Classrooms (34.3%)
- Staff offices and staff rooms (27.2%)

70.1% said there are times when they are unable to complete all of their daily duties because there is just too much work and not enough staff to do the work.

92.4% of custodians/caretakers/cleaners said their job contributes to student safety. When asked how, they identified hygiene and reducing risk of illness, cleaning the school yard of sharps and other unsafe items, and overall health and safety of schools.

## SCHOOL SECRETARIES/CLERICAL

School secretaries and office clerical staff are vital to the operations of a school. They provide support to all staff, including principals/vice-principals, support student needs, act as the contact with parents and others in the community, amongst dozens (if not hundreds) of other responsibilities.

76.7% of School Secretaries/Clerical staff said that additional duties have been downloaded to them over the past five years. Each respondent identified several duties that have increased their workload. The most common are:

- Additional administrative duties assigned by the principal/vice-principal (80.3%)
- Learning new administrative procedures (76.5%)
- Managing the door/buzzer (access to the school) (69.8%)
- Safe school arrival (66.9%)
- Duties related to reporting information to the principal/vice principal or school board (63%)
- Additional administrative duties assigned by the school board administration (62.7%)
- Cash handling (54%)

On average, these additional tasks have added 71.1 minutes to the workload of school secretaries and clerical staff.

94% of school secretaries and clerical staff say that they sometimes find themselves spending part of their day catching up on duties they were unable to complete the previous day. 60.7% say this happens every day.

96.5% of school secretaries and clerical staff say they regularly have to deal with interruptions during the workday that distract from their regular duties. 93.5% of these members say it happens multiple times a day. Survey respondents each indicated multiple sources of distractions, including:

- Students needing assistance (e.g. with illness or injury, needing to call home, etc.) (95.4%)
- Phone calls from parents (92.9%)
- Answering the door/buzzer (to safeguard access to the school) (76.9%)
- Receiving Deliveries (76.4%)
- Phone calls from the general public (69.6%)
- School lunches (organizing and/or distributing) (56.7%)

All of these causes are important and require attention of staff. The problems arise when staff are already overworked, it becomes untenable to provide all the supports parents, students, and other staff need.



## MAINTENANCE & TRADES

Maintenance and trades workers do repairs and upkeep on school facilities, including plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, heating and ventilation work, and a host of other skilled trades. Despite the provincial government's alleged promotion of trades, scant attention has been paid to making sure that there are good, secure jobs for skilled trades and maintenance workers in Ontario schools.

For example, 82.4% of maintenance and trades workers said the school board contracts out work that they do. 92.3% said the school board contracts out work done by tradespersons in a different classification from their own.

Additionally, 87.3% of survey respondents said they are sometimes required to fix problems with work done by external contractors.

66.2% of survey respondents said there is a recruitment and retention problem for trades and maintenance workers in their classification at the school board. 83.2% said that there is a recruitment and retention problem for tradespersons in classifications other than their own. Generally, this has to do with wages that are not competitive in the local labour market – something that will require an investment from government to remedy.

91% of trades and maintenance workers say there are jobs that are delayed, or go undone, because there are too many jobs and not enough staff. 42.1% of survey respondents said they do not have enough time in a day to get to all of the jobs they are asked to do, indicating a problem of understaffing.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFF

With increased reliance on technological devices in learning (and in school administration), and the increasing need for reliable and accessible connectivity, the importance of IT staff increases every year. A modern school system cannot function well without the skilled support of Information Technology staff.

77.9% of IT staff say their workload has increased over the past five years. Causes of the increase in workload include: having more devices to take care of, having more schools to cover and fewer staff, and increased student needs.

63.6% said the expansion of online learning has been a source of increased workload.

59.6% of IT staff said there are demands on their time that are so great that they find it difficult or impossible to get all of their assigned duties done within a reasonable time.

69.1% said they are sometimes required to work with IT devices or IT infrastructure that is outdated or insufficient to the needs of students.

## **LIBRARY WORKERS**

Library workers help students access and utilize libraries and learning commons. Students' reading, research, and numeracy skills are developed with the support of library workers, who also help students develop a lifelong love of reading.

87.6% of library workers say that students' literacy and numeracy skills development would be hurt if library workers are not available to support them. Respondents said their job is to help develop a love of reading and help develop reading skills that are necessary to all kinds of problem solving.

In addition to their jobs stocking libraries, making reading recommendations that are specific to students' interests, and developing skills, 81.8% of library workers also take responsibility for supervising students in their library or learning commons.

## **INSTRUCTORS**

Instructors lead a number of different kinds of classes in schools across Ontario, including English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, Indigenous Education, International Languages, Music, Literacy and Basic Skills, Outdoor Education, Swimming, and general interest courses. They support students at every level of learning, including elementary, secondary, and adult education.

Despite the important services and supports Instructors provide, 66.7% say they do not receive paid preparation time for all of the prep they do for their classes, averaging 100.5 minutes of unpaid preparation per week.

Similarly, 71.6% said they do not receive paid time for all of the evaluations and grading required for their classes, averaging 89.5 minutes of unpaid grading or assessment each week.

## STUDENT SUPERVISORS

Student supervisors are responsible for supervising students during lunch periods and by doing yard duty during recess. They play an important role in student safety. 65.6% of student supervisors, however, have reported that the number of students they supervise has increased over the past five years, increasing their workload and stretching resources thin.

In addition to their supervisory duties, 41.9% of survey respondents said they are sometimes asked to perform the duties of someone in another job classification, highlighting the overall problem of understaffing. These respondents identified several job classifications for which they are asked to cover:

- Educational Assistants (77.8%)
- Early Childhood Educators (33.3%)
- School Secretaries (17.8%)
- Custodians (17.8%)

## CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Workers in central administration (at school board offices) provide necessary supports to schools and the board as a whole. Although not always visible, school boards could not function without staff at board offices.

73.8% of central administration/board office staff who participated in this survey say their workloads have increased over the past five years. When asked about the source of the increase in workload, staff said cutbacks, increased expectations from the government, and an overall heavy volume of work.

37.6% of central administration staff say that positions like theirs have been eliminated at the board over the past five years. This has resulted in increased stress and burnout, increased workloads, and low morale.

At the same time, 66.1% of respondents say there has been an increase in senior management positions at the board. Frontline workers are expected to do more with less, which is putting a strain on the entire system.

## PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS

Professional classifications include Speech Language Pathologists, Social Workers, Psychological Clinicians, Communicative Disorder Assistants, and a wide variety of other positions across the province. They are highly educated, highly skilled workers who provide supports to a broad spectrum of students, making it more possible for them to succeed in school and outside of school.

74.4% of professional/paraprofessional staff say that the number of students they support has increased over the past five years.

91.4% of professional/paraprofessional staff say that the intensity of student needs has increased over the past five years. Survey respondents said that this has meant that there is less individualized time with students, and that they have a much higher workload than previous years.

63.9% of respondents said that there is a waiting list for students who need, but do not yet receive, the services provided by professional/paraprofessional staff. 44.9% said that students are on waiting lists for more than 3 months (on average – more than 1/5 are waiting more than 9 months). 19.7% indicated that the wait was 1 to 3 months, and 32.4% of survey participants indicated that the wait was less than 1 month.

## CONCLUSION

Education workers in all classifications have clearly indicated that there are not enough staff in schools to provide the services and supports students need. They have highlighted the effects of these staffing shortfalls on student experiences, the rise in violent incidents in schools, and on the overall functioning of schools. There is clearly a crisis of understaffing in schools. It is absolutely necessary for the government to increase funding to school boards, with requirements that funds be dedicated to hiring more staff in all education worker positions.

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