

# Vital staff beyond teachers

2017

*This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.*

Teachers do not work alone, and a school community consists of more than individual classrooms. The whole school environment supports student success by encouraging academic achievement<sup>1</sup> and ensuring the physical, social, and emotional well-being of students.<sup>2</sup>

Every day, individuals from a variety of backgrounds and experience come together in schools to help students achieve their academic and personal goals. They often go beyond their assigned roles, connecting with students and providing both formal and informal support and guidance.

Alongside teachers, staff such as psychologists, attendance counsellors, child and youth workers, computer technicians, educational assistants, and administrators work with students on a daily basis.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 provides an overview of the many people who support student learning. In this year's survey, People for Education collected information about psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, and speech-language pathologists.

## In 2017:

- 61% of elementary schools and 50% of secondary schools report that they do not have sufficient access to a psychologist to adequately support students.
- 47% of elementary and 36% of secondary schools report that child and youth worker services are not available.
- 49% of elementary and 81% of secondary schools have regularly scheduled access to a social worker.

Table 1

## School staff beyond teachers

<b>Applied behavior analysis specialists</b> Support students with autism spectrum and other developmental disorders.	<b>Attendance counsellors</b> Provide counselling and support to ensure that every child, aged 6 to 18, is attending school.	<b>Audiologists</b> Support student hearing needs, including the interpretation of assessments for classroom planning and therapy for students.
<b>Custodians</b> Responsible for the maintenance of school facilities.	<b>Early childhood educators</b> Co-teach with teachers in Kindergarten classes, providing individualized support when needed.	<b>Educational assistants</b> Provide educational support in the classroom to groups or individual students.
<b>Occupational therapists</b> Support students in overcoming barriers that might prevent their participation in the activities of daily life.	<b>Office staff</b> Responsible for administrative tasks, including maintaining the budget and attendance records.	<b>Physiotherapists</b> Work with students, school staff, and parents to develop plans and provide therapy for students with physical challenges.
<b>Quality learning environments depend on the contributions of many individuals in diverse roles that support student development.</b>		
		<b>Speech-language pathologists</b> Provide oral communication assessments, in-service teacher learning, and speech-language therapy.

# **YOUR neighbourhood SCHOOL**

## **Child and youth workers**

Support students experiencing personal crises or behaviour problems.

## **Community relations officers**

Act as liaisons between home, school and community by coordinating newcomer support, family literacy, tutoring, translation, etc.

## **Computer technicians**

Maintain and repair computers and related technology.

## **Hall monitors**

Protect students by enforcing safety protocols.

## **Library technicians**

Responsible for maintaining and assisting with the use of library materials.

## **Lunchroom supervisors**

Supervise students during the lunch hour.

## **Principals**

Set the strategic direction for the school, and act as instructional and administrative leaders.

## **Psychologists**

Provide consultation and professional development to staff, as well as assessment, counselling, and programs for students.

## **Social workers**

Support students with social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties.

## **Tradespeople**

Responsible for specialized repairs and maintenance of school facilities.

## **Vice principals**

Support the principal in his or her instructional and administrative leadership tasks.

## **Community agencies**

Partner with schools to support students and families. These include agencies such as public health, parks and recreation and Children and Youth Services.

## Funding for professionals and para-professionals

Funding for non-teaching staff is provided through several Ministry of Education grants, including the Pupil Foundation Grant, the School Foundation Grant, and several Special Purpose Grants. Professionals and paraprofessionals (such as psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, speech–language pathologists, hall monitors and lunch-room supervisors) are funded in the Pupil Foundation Grant at a rate of one for every 578 students in elementary schools, and one for every 452 students in secondary schools.<sup>4</sup> School boards can hire professionals and paraprofessionals at their own discretion, according to the needs of their school communities. Because funding for these positions is pooled, increased spending on one type of position means there is less funding for other positions.

### Psychologists

School psychologists<sup>5</sup> are mental health professionals who can assess students' special needs, as well as diagnose mental health problems, provide intervention, and assist teaching staff in supporting struggling students.

In 2017:

- 38% of elementary and 40% of secondary schools report they have regularly scheduled access to a psychologist.
- 49% of elementary and 45% of secondary schools report that they have on-call access to a psychologist.
- 13% of elementary and 16% of secondary schools report that psychologist services are not available.
- 61% of elementary and 50% of secondary principals report they do not have sufficient access to psychologists to adequately support students.

### “The mental health needs of our students are, at times, overwhelming”<sup>6</sup>

In 2011, the Ontario government introduced *Open Minds, Healthy Minds*, a comprehensive ten-year mental health and addictions strategy.<sup>7</sup> One of its overall goals was to “identify mental health and addictions problems early, and intervene.”<sup>8</sup> The strategy identifies a need to build “school-based capacity,” including enhancing mental health resources in schools.<sup>9</sup> School boards are provided with funding for a Mental Health Leader, to create “a more integrated and responsive child and youth mental health and addictions system.”<sup>10</sup> This funding is “enveloped” (i.e. to be spent only on the specified area).

In their survey comments, principals—particularly in secondary schools—report significant concerns about providing mental health support.

“Based on the increasing mental health issues students are facing, there just isn’t enough time for our social worker/psychologist to meet the demands of all the students needing support. That being said, the time students do have with these individuals is supportive and encouraging.”

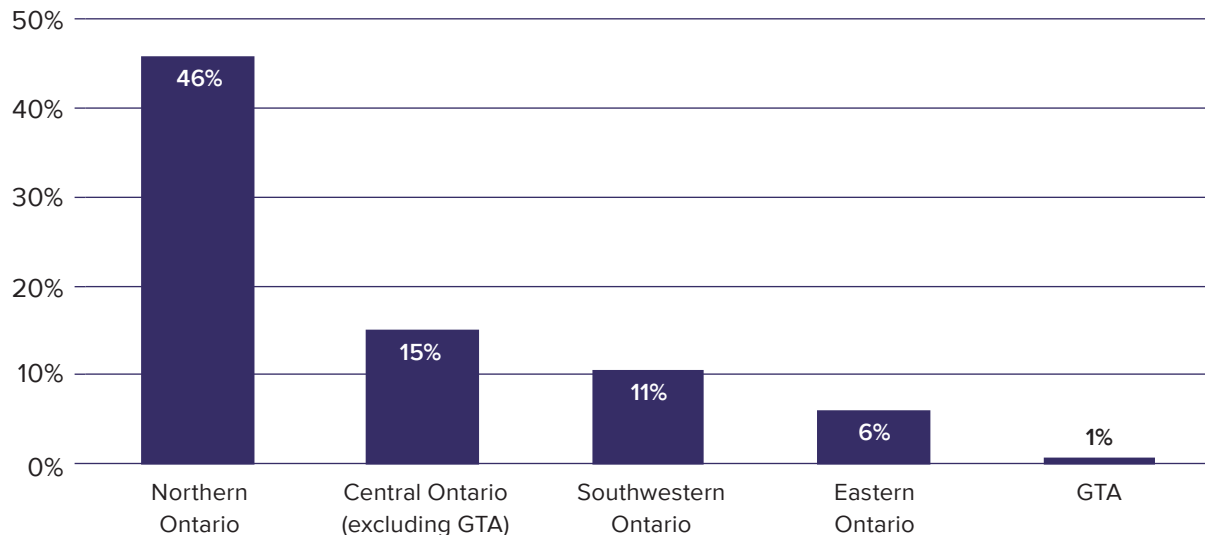
Secondary school, Peel DSB

“Our adolescent care worker plays a vital role in the lives of many of our students. Community services for drug and alcohol and mental health also provide critical assistance for many students. Unfortunately, there is a need for even more services in all of these areas. The mental health needs of our students are at times overwhelming.”

Secondary school, Limestone DSB

Figure 1

## Percentage of elementary schools with no psychologist services available, by region



“Support is not always available—psychologist is used mainly for assessing, not for counselling on a regular basis; social worker is able to talk with approximately three students on her half[-day] weekly visit; speech pathologist mainly for assessing and observations, also half a day once a week; weekly visits can be missed due to crisis at another school, or meetings.”

Elementary school,  
Ottawa-Carleton DSB

According to the Ontario Psychological Association’s guidelines, school boards should employ one school psychologist for every 1000 students.<sup>11</sup> However, the Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards recently reported that the ratio of psychology staff to students is, on average, over 1 to 3,500, and has reached 1 to 8,000 in some cases.<sup>12</sup>

In the 2017 survey, 61% of elementary principals and 50% of secondary principals report insufficient access to psychologists to meet the needs of their students. Almost half of schools report that they have access to a psychologist only on an on-call basis.

### Special education assessments

Although the Ministry of Education sets criteria for special education exceptionalities, school boards determine their own special education identification processes. In some cases, students can only access certain special education services after a professional assessment.<sup>13</sup> These assessments provide vital information to the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process. IPRCs determine whether a student meets the criteria for formal identification and the appropriate support for that student. Assessments provide diagnoses, if applicable, as well as information about the child’s learning profile and relevant educational recommendations. According to the Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards, assessments can take as long as 20 hours.<sup>14</sup>

Psychologists and other professionals report they are pulled in multiple directions due to the need for assessments, counselling, and consultation. They say that the pressure to complete assessments affects their ability to provide other services.<sup>15</sup>

## Child and youth workers, social workers, and speech-language pathologists

This year's survey results indicate that many schools have limited access to professional and paraprofessional services.

Access to child and youth workers (CYWs):

- 35% of elementary and 45% of secondary schools report having regularly scheduled access to CYWs.
- 47% of elementary and 36% of secondary schools report that CYW services are not available.
- 71% of elementary and 54% of secondary principals report that they do not have sufficient access to CYWs to adequately support their students.

Access to social workers:

- 49% of elementary and 81% of secondary schools report having regularly scheduled access to a social worker.
- 15% of elementary and 6% of secondary schools report that social workers are not available.
- 55% of elementary and 47% of secondary principals report they do not have sufficient access to a social worker to adequately support their students.

Access to speech–language pathologists (SLPs):

- 51% of elementary and 10% of secondary schools report having regularly scheduled access to SLPs.
- 2% of elementary and 10% of secondary schools report that no SLP services are available.
- Only 37% of elementary and 28% of secondary principals report that they do not have sufficient access to SLPs to adequately support students.

In French language school boards, the issue of access is compounded by language barriers. In some communities, schools report that they can only access Anglophone professionals and paraprofessionals.

“Progress can be seen in students who receive services on a regular basis. On the other hand, sessions in speech therapy, for example, are given in blocks. Once the block is over, there is no support to continue, even if the goals are not met... The social worker does not come to school unless we have cases. I think at this point, we should give children preventative sessions, instead of intervening when everyone is in shock, or crisis, and they do not want to receive services, as they are not seeing clearly.”

Elementary school,  
CSDC Centre-Sud<sup>16</sup>

“Our speech therapist is a four-hour drive from our community, so local services, once we are off the waiting list, come from an outside, English-speaking organization.”

Elementary school,  
CSDC des Aurores boréales<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

1. Joseph Murphy et al., “Academic Press: Translating High Expectations into School Policies and Classroom Practices,” *Educational Leadership* 40 (December 1982): 22-7.
2. Jonathan Cohen et al., “School Climate: Research, Policy, Practice, and Teacher Education” *Teachers College Record* 111, no. 1 (2009): 180-213.
3. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, 2016), 18.
4. *Ibid.*, 18-23.
5. In this document we will use the term “psychologist” to include registered psychologists and registered psychological associates, as well as supervised non-registered psychology service providers in schools.
6. Comment from the 2016/17 survey, secondary school, Limestone DSB.
7. Government of Ontario, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario’s Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* (Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, June 2011).
8. *Ibid.*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 14.
10. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17*, 68.
11. Donald H. Saklofske et al., “School Psychology in Canada: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives,” in *School Psychology: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Thomas K. Fagan and Paula Sachs Wise (Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists, 2007), 297-338.
12. Jan Kasperski, *Issue Brief: Psychology in Education*, (Toronto, ON: Ontario Psychology Association, April, 2016).
13. *Ibid.*
14. Maria Kokai and Debra Lean, *Response to People for Education Reports Regarding Access to Psychological Services, Guidance Services and De-streaming Grade 9*, (letter, Toronto: ON, October 26, 2015).
15. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
16. This quote has been translated from French. Original quote: “Il est possible de voir les progrès chez les élèves qui reçoivent des services de façon régulière. Par contre, les sessions en orthophonie par exemple, sont données en bloc. Une fois le bloc terminé, aucun soutien pour continuer, même si les buts de sont pas atteints. Plusieurs parents ont des services à l’externe dont nous ne sommes pas nécessairement au courant. La travailleuse sociale ne vient pas à l’école à moins que nous ayons des cas. Je crois que l’on devrait, à ce moment, donner aux enfants des sessions de prévention au lieu d’intervenir lorsque tout le monde est en état de choqué, en crise ou autre et qu’ils ne veulent pas recevoir de services puisqu’ils ne voient pas clair.”
17. This quote has been translated from French. Original quote: “Notre orthophoniste est à quatre heures de route de notre communauté donc les services locaux, si on n’est plus sur la liste d’attente, provient d’un organisme anglophone externe.”