

## Mental Health: It's Worth Protecting

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) recognizes that while observing Mental Health Week last week, many of you were experiencing the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. ETFO holds the Ford government responsible for the toll the pandemic has taken on you and on students, and we continue to be concerned about the government's negligent and uncaring attitude towards the needs of education workers.

ETFO is sharing new research that shows its members are experiencing negative mental health impacts linked to the Ford government's failed response to COVID-19. The province's chronic underfunding of public education during the pandemic has led to unnecessary, negative mental health impacts for educators, including symptoms of anxiety and depression.

More than 5,000 ETFO members participated in a mental health survey from November 23 to December 15, 2020. The results are being analyzed by the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers and the Institute for Work & Health. The research will be posted on <http://etfohealthandsafety.ca/site/psychosocial-hazards/> once published.

Preliminary survey results of the ETFO Pandemic Experience Survey show that:

- 79 per cent of women and 71 per cent of men had a burnout score above 75 (on a scale of 0 to 100). The 2019 Canadian worker average burnout score was 52 (54 for the education sector). The level of burnout was worse for those who work remotely. Participants also reported a quantitative increase in high work demands, fast work pace, little predictability, role conflicts, and fear.
- ETFO members in hybrid learning rated the psychological health and safety environment most negatively.
- Two-thirds of ETFO members reported that less than half of their needs for infection control practices are met. Unmet needs include concerns about physical distancing, physical barriers, cohorting, screening, face coverings and Personal Protective Equipment. These unmet needs have led to sleep disturbances, and are strongly correlated to symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Only 13 per cent of ETFO members indicated that the ventilation in schools was appropriate and adequate.
- Only 6 per cent of respondents felt the government was doing its best to protect them and others at work.

To support the work and mental health of educators, ETFO urges the government to:

- improve school safety by mandating smaller classes and masking in Kindergarten;
- evaluate and improve ventilation using CO2 monitors, HVAC upgrades and portable air purification units;
- increase funding to ensure infection control requirements in schools are met;
- consult with educators, unions and other education partners to develop appropriate supports; and
- allocate funds and resources to mental health services.

ETFO also expects school boards to be reasonable and compassionate toward staff during these stressful times.

Many days have been tough, and there are ongoing challenges for everyone. The work elementary educators do makes an incredible difference in the lives of students and families. Saying thanks doesn't seem like enough, but ETFO wants you to know that your commitment and dedication are remarkable and appreciated. As we reflect following Mental Health Week, please take care of yourself and reach out for any help you need.

Well-being resources can be found at [www.otip.com/wellbeing](http://www.otip.com/wellbeing) and [www.etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/Employees/PRSMattersBulletin/Pages/Member%20Mental%20Health.aspx](http://www.etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/Employees/PRSMattersBulletin/Pages/Member%20Mental%20Health.aspx)