W.R.D.S.B. EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS ASSOCIATION

eUpdate

The Latest Information to Keep YOU Informed

As a member of the Coalition of Educational Assistants of Ontario (CEAO) we recently supported a survey seeking input from EAA members about the effects that fail to fills are having on their work and the students they support. Please read the attached letter addressed to the Minister of Education outlining the issue and asking for support.

Any questions or concerns can be directed to the EAA office 519-624-1221 or email wrdsbeaa@gmail.com.

December 15, 2021

Dear Minister Lecce:

We are writing on behalf of the Coalition of Educational Assistants of Ontario (CEAO), whose member unions represent over 4000 Education Support Staff and include educational assistants, education resource workers, child and youth workers, and designated early childhood educators in the publicly funded school system.

School Boards in the 2021-2022 school year are experiencing significant challenges with regard to appropriate and safe staffing levels in schools. In recent years, School Boards were experiencing difficulties finding qualified support staff and filling vacancies. Unfortunately, this problem has escalated into a crisis where multiple contracts and daily absences are not being filled, thus impacting student learning and safety because there is not an educator there to support them. The CEAO recently conducted a survey of our membership to understand how unfilled staff absences impact their work and the students they support.

impacts on all students, including those needing special education support. Several workers reported that students were being sent home or not receiving any additional support while at school due to lack of staffing. Others stressed that student social, emotional, and physical needs were not being met which is manifesting into an increase in maladaptive behaviours.

Staff expressed they are running everywhere “putting out fires” rather than implementing prevention strategies and providing supportive education. To fill vacancies, some Boards have resorted to filling jobs by using unqualified staff. Education support staff are burdened with feelings of despair, hopelessness and sadness because their students are not receiving the necessary support. These workers are the voices and advocates for our most vulnerable students and they want you to know these students are in crisis. With the current lack of support of Educational Assistants, DECE's and CYWs, the strategies and interventions developed by teachers and other support staff, are not meeting the current demands in today's schools.

When roles are not filled, classrooms are closed or the workload is distributed to the remaining staff. We are not speaking only about individual situations, but rather extended absences lapsing over weeks or months that are not being filled. Staff are struggling to implement proper safety plans while improvising as they are pulled in multiple directions. Our support workers are dedicated individuals who are putting their students' needs first by not taking their lunch breaks, canceling important medical appointments, and working additional hours without pay. As commendable as this may be, it is taking its toll on worker’s health and wellbeing resulting in increased WSIB incidents, compassion fatigue and staff burnout. There is a record number of workers on medical leaves, unpaid leaves, and a drastic increase of retirements and resignations as this issue continues to be unresolved. This, in turn, is creating additional vacancies in an already desperate situation.

We need your help.

We are asking that our provincial government plan for the future to alleviate the pressures on these support workers. We need to attract more workers into this profession by providing additional funding to school boards to hire the necessary qualified staff and ensure a sufficient supply of qualified workers by supporting community college programs. Some examples are, DPCDSB has

anticipates only 27 graduates in June 2022 from the Education Support Program, which is well below the standard attrition numbers for this area.

More education support workers are needed to bear the changes made in 2019 to the Ontario Autism Program that resulted in many children returning full time to school without the necessary support in place. As the waitlist for the needs-based program increases, children are missing out on the vital services needed to help them with their development. We believe no child should feel less important and left out. All students are entitled to an education, but how is this possible with the lack of academic support for students with disabilities?

We look forward to hearing from you with respect to the above at your earliest opportunity. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the representatives of the CEAO listed below.

Respectfully yours,

Coalition of Educational Assistants of Ontario (CEAO) per:

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Colleen Dietrich Sisson - Educational Assistants Association: 519-624-1221
Kezia Motluk - Halton District Educational Assistants Association: 905-639-3680

cc: Honourable Doug Ford
Andrea Horwath, Leader, Official Opposition
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education
Andrew Davis, Assistant Deputy Minister (Education)
Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations (Minister’s Office)
Marianne Mazzorato, Director of Education, Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)
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Curtis Ennis , Director of Education , Halton District School Board (HDSB)
Executive Director, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
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