

ETFO member survey shows violence pervasive in schools **Chronic underfunding of public education responsible for rise in violence**

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TORONTO, ON – An alarming number (77 per cent) of members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) say they have personally experienced violence or witnessed violence against another staff member, according to a survey conducted for the Federation in February and March 2023.

“Learning is being disrupted and violence is being normalized in schools because the Ford government refuses to adequately invest in public education. The system is suffering from chronic underfunding, under-resourcing, and understaffing, creating environments where student needs are going unmet,” says ETFO President Karen Brown. “The province must provide adequate funding so learning and working environments are physically and psychologically safe for students, teachers, and education workers.”

As the Ford government continues to make cuts to public education funding, survey results reveal:

- Educators working with younger students are more likely to experience violence.
- Eighty-six per cent of ETFO members who work in special education have personally experienced violence or witnessed it against another staff person.
- Four out of five members state there are more incidents of violence in schools now than when they started working in the Ontario public elementary school system.
- Two-thirds of members say the severity of violent incidents has increased and 72 per cent say the number of incidents has increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- More than 80 per cent agree that violence in schools is making working with students more difficult and that it interferes with classroom management.
- Front-line supports are often not available to educators and students. A majority report that educational assistants (61 per cent), social workers (56 per cent), and child and youth workers (53 per cent) were available only some of the time, rarely or never when needed this school year.
- Administrators know that violence is a problem, but do not always act on reports of violence.
- Forty-two per cent of members have suffered a physical injury, illness or psychological injury/illness as a result of workplace violence against them this school year.
- Approximately 30 per cent of ETFO members' injuries warranted a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board claim although those claims weren't always submitted.

The research report, produced by Strategic Communications Inc., will be available at etfo.ca.

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It's clear that many school spaces are not safe, especially for those working on the front lines with students whose needs are not being met. Notes Brown, "Students would never choose these behaviours. This is symptomatic of a system where students are not getting the supports and resources they need—not for their education nor for their mental health."

Students who are struggling, and especially students with special education needs, have been chronically under-served by the government. School boards are not getting adequate funding to ensure students get access to early assessments and front-line support workers. There is a critical need for more educational assistants, special education teachers, psychologists, behavioural therapists, school support counsellors, child and youth workers and speech-language pathologists to meet the promise of an inclusive education system.

Despite knowing educators and other education workers are being injured at an alarming rate, the provincial government continues to fail to address violence in schools. "The Ford government seems to consider injuries to teachers and education workers as collateral damage in their quest to starve the public education system of funding," notes Brown. "By putting corporate profits first, they are leaving our public services, including public education, understaffed and under-resourced, which is contributing to the rise in incidents and the severity of violence in schools."

ETFO supports Ontario's integrated model for education, which means that students, whenever possible, should be learning together with their same-age peers regardless of their needs. This, however, requires full funding and full support. The government shouldn't imagine that inclusion is a way to cut costs. They must provide adequate funding for staffing, training, and resources.

Providing funding for the needs of all students is, at its core, a human rights issue. The Ford government must take immediate action to address the unacceptable and troubling rise of violence in schools.

ETFO's [Multi-Year Strategy to Address Workplace Violence](#) publicly highlights the workplace violence ETFO members experience every day. To learn more about ETFO's multi-year strategy and workers' rights, visit etfohealthandsafety.ca.

[ETFO](#) represents approximately 83,000 members, including public elementary teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel. Visit BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

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