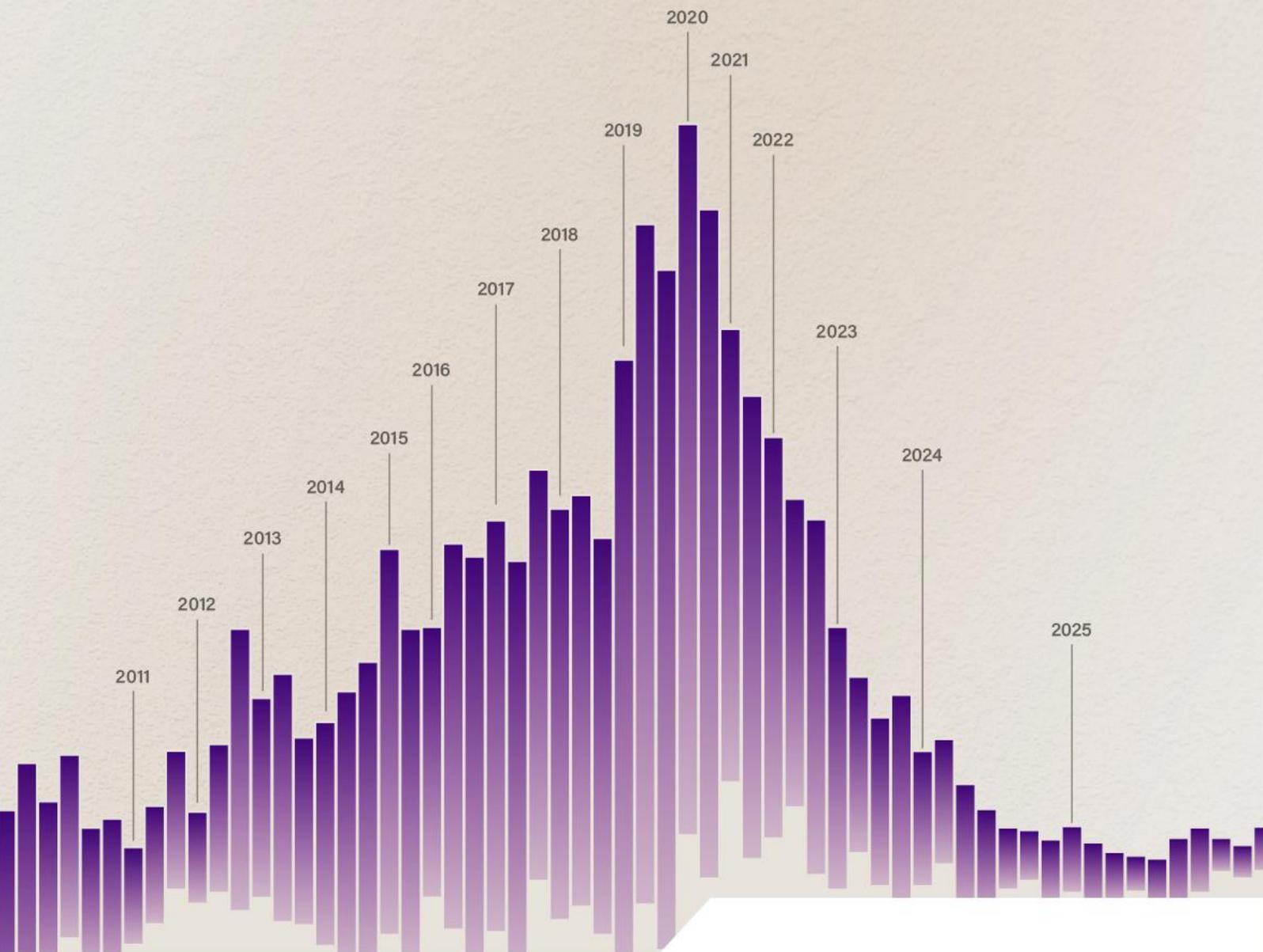


The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey:

15 YEARS OF DATA



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2025 DATA**

 **ACU** INSTITUTE FOR
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
& EDUCATION

 **HEALTH & WELLBEING[®]**

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FOREWORDS

Report Highlights

This year marks 15 years of data collection (2011–2025) for the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey. To celebrate this milestone, this report showcases key trends in principals' occupational health, safety, and wellbeing over the past 15 years. It also features reflections and feedback from key stakeholders and our survey champions, offering valuable insights into the experiences behind the data.

Contributing to School Leader Wellbeing

We continue to thank our research partners' generous efforts, ACU has been able to continue this important longitudinal study. The whole team is very grateful to our research partners for substantially contributing monetary and in-kind support to this project. Our gratitude to Catholic Schools New South Wales (CSNSW), Catholic Secondary Principals Australia (CaSPA), NSW Secondary Principals' Council (NSWSPC), Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association (ACPPA), Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), Victorian Principal Associations (VPA), and Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA).

We want to thank the ongoing and new principals and school executives for taking part in this important research, demonstrating their trust and commitment to this study and its contribution to improving the health, safety, and wellbeing of school leaders across Australia. The research team would like to give special acknowledgement to Emeritus Professor Riley for his ground-breaking work establishing the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey.

Looking Ahead

Australian principals will continue to be central to the strength and future of our education system, and this research remains essential in understanding how best to support them. We cannot carry this important work forward without the engagement of our survey participants, the collaboration of our research partners, and the dedication of our research team. Thank you all for your continued support - it truly enables the progress we make together.

Professor Theresa Dicke

*Project Lead of the Health and Wellbeing Project
Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE)
Australian Catholic University (ACU)*

Principal Health and Wellbeing: What is happening around the world?

This project started because having been a school principal myself, I had witnessed first-hand the difficulties faced by people taking up the role. The survey only exists because Monash University provided extraordinary support so I could spend a year preparing for the first wave of data collection. I met with everyone I could to produce survey results that could not be ignored by departments of education. I was initially advised by experts to use the media to our advantage. “Get the news into the news and the politicians will get involved”, I was told. The media coverage has been spectacular, for which I am also grateful as this has led to positive engagement with the issues by departments around the country. Approximately half the Australian population hears about the survey each year through legacy media. And yet the results are still so bad that they should be deeply troubling at a national level. While some jurisdictions are trying to improve school functioning, the national culture is trending negatively faster than interventions are being implemented. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to begin and direct this survey that has now reached a 15-year milestone. But a lot more must be done. We need step change.

A lot has been happening around the world to promote principal health and wellbeing since this research project commenced. It is now on the national agenda. The principal is the canary in the coal mine: their health and wellbeing is a good proxy for the health of the school as a whole.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, the media interest focussed on the offensive behaviour which has been trending up in all countries since the survey began. Less attention has been paid to the more insidious problem of moral stress. In both Australia and New Zealand 99% of principals are working dangerously long hours every week. They rate this as their most significant stressor and their second highest stressor is “not enough time to devote to teaching and learning”. This produces moral stress: interference or even blocking of professional behaviours guided by moral purpose. It may be even more dangerous than other stressors due to its impact on one’s identity.



And some good news...

After eight long years of annually telling the various Australian state and territory governments they have a series of issues that need addressing, there has been some significant movement toward recognising that principal health and wellbeing is important and putting better policies in place to help alleviate some of the worst aspects of the role. The three largest state governments, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales have each committed over \$100 million to address the most pressing issues, and the other states and territories are also looking at positive change. The Northern Territory has expanded the research to include teachers: a very positive move for the profession. We are now seeing national campaigns to address occupational violence in schools, hospitals and the like but the situation is deteriorating faster than these interventions are helping.

Sadly, the number of parents who perpetrate violent acts in schools has been increasing year on year. And it's not just the number of incidents, but also the severity. So, as you read this year's report, spare a thought for the leaders who are trying to protect the children and the staff they are responsible for proactively. Until Australia acknowledges the root causes of violence and sets about addressing them at every level of society, principals will be forced to make tough decisions.

Professor Philip Riley

***Founder of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing
Deakin University***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2025 marks the 15th year of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey, a longitudinal study led by the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at Australian Catholic University which commenced in 2011. The great number of returning participants in the survey provides a robust and longitudinal overview of occupational health, safety, and wellbeing trends in school leadership.

8,110+

Total participants since 2011

2,044

Respondents in 2025

79%

Returning participants

Like last year, there are some encouraging signs throughout this year’s findings, albeit minimal. Given the adverse trends in several key data in our report over the past few years, though, a slowing of this trend, or a slight improvement, is welcome. Urgency among policy makers, system leaders, and professional associations over the last few years to address these concerns has seen important changes, and it is possible we are beginning to see the fruits of these efforts. While this is encouraging, and hopefully this trajectory will continue, there remains concern about the sustainability of the principalship as it is currently experienced.

The representative sampling of the survey has stabilised as it has matured. Demographic distributions now provide a more representative pattern, adding weight to its findings and recommendations:

- Sector distributions now broadly reflect Australia’s three education sectors, including changes across sectors. One important change is evident in the increased proportion of participants choosing not to disclose the sector in which they work; in 2011, 100% of participants indicated their sector, while in 2025 only 88% provided this information;
- State distributions have changed significantly since 2011 when 40% of participants were in Victoria. The profile is now more representative of state and territory distributions;
- There is a significant difference in the age distribution between 2011 and 2025. The average age increased from 51.3 (2011) to 53.8 (2025). When looking at the median age of current school leaders, it is 49 in 2011 and 55 in 2025. This suggests policy priorities around leadership development for aspiring principals and middle leaders (seen as the pipeline of future principals) are even more urgent. It also underscores a need to provide renewal opportunities for experienced principals in the latter stages of their careers to ensure there is not a rapid change to the profile brought about by early retirement or other exit strategies.

The key findings below are unambiguous in their story: while the core focus of principals' work is responsibility for teaching and learning, the way the work is crafted, experienced, and the resources available to do it, have all altered fundamentally since 2011. Support for mental health concerns for students and teachers has emerged as two of the most significant components of the changing work of principals. This further restricts the amount of time and emotional energy principals have for the core work of teaching and learning. Without significant system support, it is likely many principals will continue to experience high levels of stress and seriously consider other options.

A focus throughout the life of the survey are the types of offensive behaviours principals experience. We have consistently called for this to be a national community-wide conversation, and it appears there is some slight improvement. This courageous conversation must continue, given the impact these behaviours have on principals' health and wellbeing. These behaviours are not acceptable in any workplace and addressing this is the responsibility of all parents and caregivers, as well as the wider community. Where positive strategies are in place, such as in Victoria with its School Community Safety Order, there is a marked difference in the prevalence of these unacceptable behaviours towards principals.

Since their introduction in 2018, Red Flag email alerts have become a key indicator of elevated psychosocial risk, allowing the project to track changes in wellbeing risk over time. This year's report shows an encouraging overall decline of Red Flag emails, however there is a concerning increase in reports of self-harm. This reinforces our call from last year's report that policy makers and system leaders need to engage directly with principals to help them seek support when needed. Principal preparation programs across the country must include strategies for identifying when and how to seek help; not doing so increases the potential for personnel loss and will have system wide implications.

Similar concerns are evident in scales that report Generalised Anxiety and Depression. These scales were introduced in 2023, so longer time comparisons are not available. A concern to note is a slight increase in participants receiving severe scores in either, or both scales.

Despite these concerning data, many principals appear highly motivated, find great satisfaction in their work, and show resilience in the face of these difficulties. Our concern remains this is not a sustainable situation and ought not be used as a justification for allowing the status quo to continue. Too many school leaders are at too great a risk of burnout. Without structural and systematic change, the risk of principals acting on their intention to consider leaving their current role (54.4%) is high.

2011 was also significant for Australia's principals as it was the year the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership introduced its [Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#) (the Standard). Our survey has charted annually the experience of school principalship across the same time since the introduction of the Standard.

Myriad voices across the past 15 years have called for rethinking how the principalship is configured, supported, and appreciated across the wider community. It seems timely for a comprehensive review of the Standard in light of 15 years of our reports, complemented by other major reports^[1]. Policy makers, along with the research community, must work with professional associations and system leaders not only to refresh the description of

how school leaders work, but move beyond this to find new ways to craft the work, to resource the work, and to provide meaningful support to sustain the work.

Key Findings

- **Workload and Hours:** School leaders continue to work long hours, averaging 53.9 hours per week during term and 19.6 hours during holidays. This is well above an average working week in Australia. It is encouraging to see some reduction in reported hours worked; in 2011, 27.2% of participants reported working 60 hours or more, which has reduced to 21.6% in 2025. Hours remain higher for principals in independent schools (2025 average = 56.3) which is due, in part, to often-extensive programs offered through many independent schools, including weekend sport. While it is encouraging that the proportion working above-average hours has declined slightly since 2011, overall workload remains a persistent challenge.
- **Sources of Stress:** Sources of stress are reported as averages on a 1-10 scale. The top stressors in 2025 remain Sheer Quantity of Work (8.1) and Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching and Learning (7.7); these have not changed in order since 2011, although their reported averages have increased. The most significant change since 2011 is the increased stress from supporting mental health of both students and staff; Mental Health Issues of Students has risen from 5.5 (2011) to 6.8 (2025) and Mental Health Issues of Staff has risen from 5.2 (2011) also to 6.8 (2025). Managing Student Related Issues and Parent Related Issues have both continued to rise, but not as sharply as the mental health sources of stress. Combined with the lack of time available for teaching and learning, these create a work expectation that is much different to that of 2011.
- **Mental Health:** Anxiety and depression rates among school leaders remain concerning. In 2025, 10.3% of school leaders scored 'Severe' on the GAD-7 anxiety scale, and 8.2% on the PHQ-9 depression scale. Both showed slight increases since 2024 and since they were first measured in the survey in 2023. Other measures of mental health such as Depressive Symptoms and Stress in the COPSOQ have steadily remained high over the 15 years of the survey. It is worth noting that while these measures do not constitute clinical diagnoses, scores in this range would warrant professional attention. Employers must consider their workplace psychosocial safety obligations.



1 in 4 school leaders scored at least
'moderate' for anxiety

- **Turnover Intention:** Over half (54.4%) of school leaders report seriously considering leaving their current job, a consistently high figure since this was first assessed in 2023. Unfortunately, this has not become a downward trend, rising from 53.2% in 2024.
- **Offensive Behaviour:** Reports of threats and physical violence have increased over time, with 53.7% experiencing threats and 47.8% experiencing physical violence in 2025. Students are the most common source of physical violence, while parents are the main source of threats. Despite the decrease (0.8% points for threats and 1.8% points for physical) in violence in 2025, levels remain unacceptably high, particularly when compared with safety-critical professions, and

may drive the adverse psychosocial outcomes and the intention to quit the profession.

- **Psychosocial Risk and Red Flag Emails:** 39.1% of school leaders triggered a Red Flag email indicating elevated psychosocial risk, with higher rates among government and special school leaders. This is lower than 2024 and may indicate some early positive steps at improving school leader wellbeing. However, Red Flag emails have shown an overall upward trend since 2018. Combining this with the anxiety and depression scores indicates alarming mental health pressures on school leaders.

Trends and Implications

- **Comparisons to General Population:** School leaders score less favourably than the general population on most health and wellbeing measures, particularly burnout and stress. However, they reported higher self-efficacy and commitment to their work than the general population.
 - School leadership represents a high stress position, with psychosocial outcomes trending towards unfavourable outcomes since the survey's inception.
 - The high commitment and resilience of school leaders despite the negative outcomes suggests that many school leaders are enduring substantial strain in order to remain in their roles.
 - The trends towards higher violence, anxiety, and depression are very concerning, as these are all at much higher levels than in the general population.
- **Call to Action:** This report underscores the need for continued support for school leaders, targeted interventions to address workload, mental health, and workplace safety, and ongoing collaboration among research partners and participants to drive positive change.
 - High levels of offensive behaviour (and its associated costs) represent a clear demand for action on addressing what behaviours are acceptable, particularly from parents and students.
 - Consistently high autonomy frustration and feedback from school leaders represents a need for principals to have the training and support they need to feel like they can act independently.

Principal health and wellbeing concerns are on a trajectory that continues to decline. This situation has surpassed simply being thought of as a 'crisis' and represents a seismic shift that places the continuity of the existing school leadership model at serious risk. Urgent reform that goes beyond simplistic workload reduction strategies is needed. I am worried about myself and my colleagues and am not aware of any colleague now who isn't considering some form of early exit plan from the job. Meaningful initiatives that have been tried and proven internationally, such as sabbaticals for principals, must become real options. We all have a responsibility to advocate in this space, to ensure our amazing job moves beyond being the high wire act it has become, to flourish as a sustainable professional role in which school leaders can thrive.

- Male, Government Combined QLD



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Address Workload and Time Management

School leaders have faced persistently high work demands for 15 years, with average working hours in 2025 (53.9 hours per week during term) still far exceeding a standard work week. Sheer Quantity of Work has remained the top stressor across all survey years, and Excessive Workload continues to be the greatest staff wellbeing concern. This longstanding pattern reflects workload pressures are a structural aspect of school leadership roles rather than the result of shorter-term policy-driven effects.

Why action is needed:

Chronic overload reduces leaders' capacity to engage in instructional leadership, a key driver of student learning. Systemically, unmanageable workloads increase burnout, reduce job satisfaction, and contribute to high turnover intentions that destabilise the education workforce.

Actionable steps:

- Implement workload reduction strategies: Review administrative, compliance, and reporting requirements to remove or streamline unnecessary tasks, addressing the long-term stressor of excessive workload. Produce public reporting on progress of these strategies.
- Increase support staff: Provide administrative and specialist personnel to redistribute the work of the administrative workload.
- Enable leaders to focus on core work: Structural changes that prioritise educational leadership reduce chronic burnout risk.

2. Enhance Mental Health Support

Mental health indicators show continuing concern. In 2025, more than 10% of school leaders recorded 'Severe' anxiety scores and over 8% recorded 'Severe' depression scores, with both measures trending upward since 2023. COPSOQ-III results also reveal less favourable scores for Burnout, Stress, and Sleeping troubles compared with the general population.

Why action is needed:

Leaders facing untreated mental health strain have diminished decision-making capacity, reduced emotional regulation and resilience, and increased vulnerability to burnout, illness, and early exit. At a system level, poor leader wellbeing undermines school functioning and leadership sustainability.

Actionable steps:

- Expand access to mental health services: Ensure confidential, timely counselling and psychological support for school leaders.
- Promote mental health literacy: Provide training in wellbeing awareness, self-care, and resilience-building.
- Create dedicated wellbeing roles: Specialist wellbeing professionals can offer proactive and ongoing support.
- Include mental health in principal preparation programs: Aspiring principals need to learn how to monitor their mental health and how to seek help when needed.

3. Strengthen Workplace Safety and Wellbeing

Exposure to offensive behaviours remains unacceptably high. In 2025, nearly half (47.8%) of school leaders reported physical violence and more than half reported threats of

violence (53.7%), both significant increases since 2011. A staggering 87.2% of school leaders in 2025 reported exposure to offensive behaviours. The estimated annual cost to the education sector of dealing with these offensive behaviours exceeds \$200 million^[2].

Why action is needed:

Frequent exposure to violence and aggression contributes to trauma, reduces leaders' sense of safety, and accelerates turnover intention. For the system, unsafe workplaces undermine recruitment and retention, disrupt learning environments, and divert resources away from teaching and learning.

Actionable steps:

- Develop clear protocols: Establish comprehensive reporting and response procedures for threats and violence.
- Foster positive school climates: Promote respectful relationships and conflict resolution skills among students, staff, and parents.
- Train leaders in safety management: Ensure consistent, sector-wide training in prevention, de-escalation, and safety management.

4. Support Development and Career Sustainability

Turnover intention has remained high, with more than half of school leaders again reporting that they seriously consider leaving their role. Testimony throughout the report illustrates high emotional strain, reduced autonomy, and uncertainty about the sustainability of school leadership.

Why action is needed:

Frequent leadership turnover destabilises schools, disrupts strategic initiatives, and creates costly cycles of vacancy and recruitment. Targeted development and support strengthen leaders' coping capacity, reduce isolation, and increase the likelihood of ongoing engagement in the role.

Actionable steps:

- Facilitate peer support networks: Build structured opportunities for leaders to share challenges and learn from one another.
- Offer reflective supervision: Provide structured mentoring and professional supervision for leadership growth.
- Invest in career pathways: Ensure leaders have support to navigate complex and evolving role demands.
- Increase renewal strategies for experienced principals: Provision of renewal leave, sabbatical leave, or other personal and professional renewal strategies should be widely implemented.
- Build cultures of support across systems: Principals report system engagement focuses on performance metrics and rarely engages with principals' personal welfare. Systems should invest in staff culture training which builds cooperative and empathetic relationships between system staff and principals.

5. Targeted Interventions for High-Risk Groups

Psychosocial risk varies by sector, with government and special school leaders triggering Red Flag emails at notably higher rates than their Catholic and independent counterparts. These contexts often involve higher behavioural demands, lower resourcing, and greater community complexity.

Why action is needed:

Equitable support ensures that schools serving the most vulnerable populations are not

further disadvantaged. For leaders in high-risk settings, targeted assistance directly reduces exposure to chronic stressors that threaten wellbeing and retention.

Actionable steps:

- Prioritise additional resources: Direct staffing, training, and wellbeing supports to sectors with higher psychosocial risk.
- Tailor interventions: Develop solutions suited to the specific challenges of government and special schools.

6. Promote Autonomy and Empowerment

Autonomy Satisfaction remains the lowest of the three psychological needs measured, while Autonomy Frustration is the highest. Testimonies highlight leaders feeling restricted by systemic mandates and lacking meaningful influence over school priorities.

Why action is needed:

Autonomy is a core driver of motivation, wellbeing, and effectiveness. When leaders lack decision-making authority, they experience frustration, disengagement, and reduced capacity to respond to local needs. Systemically, empowering leaders improves innovation and school performance.

Actionable steps:

- Increase decision-making authority: Review policies to ensure leaders have meaningful influence over key areas of school operation.
- Support flexible school-based implementation: Minimise prescriptive directives that limit local adaptation.
- Recognise and celebrate leadership: Reinforce competence and relatedness to strengthen wellbeing.

7. Ongoing Collaboration and Research

The 15-year longitudinal dataset provides a rare and powerful evidence base. Clear patterns across workload, stressors, violence, and psychosocial outcomes highlight that many challenges are sustained, structural rather than short-term fluctuations.

Why action is needed:

Ongoing monitoring allows policymakers and stakeholders to detect emerging risks, evaluate interventions, and refine strategies over time. Continued collaboration ensures that solutions remain grounded in leaders' lived experiences and system realities.

Actionable steps:

- Maintain and expand longitudinal research: Continue tracking key indicators to identify trends and evaluate progress.
- Engage stakeholders: Involve school leaders, partners, and policymakers in designing and refining systemic solutions.
- Share findings widely: Promote evidence-informed decision-making across the sector.

RESEARCH TEAM

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1. TESTIMONIALS

What are the testimonials?

As part of the landmark 15-year report, testimonials are included from multiple important sources. One of the original investigators responsible for the survey's creation Emeritus Professor Phil Riley and some of our research partners listed on page 11 of this report are included. In addition to them, there are testimonials from committed survey participants who have taken the survey for at least **10** out of **15** years, who are referred to as survey champions. This covers a range of stakeholders in the report from varying perspectives. When including statements from research partners and committed participants, we have made every effort to be as comprehensive as possible and gather from different demographics.

The views and opinions expressed in the testimonials in this section are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education or Australian Catholic University.

Some testimonials have been truncated for inclusion in the report, the full comment is available in the appendix

Words from Emeritus Professor Phil Riley



A Founder's Reflection: Fifteen Years On

The following reflection represents Professor Riley's personal views, informed by fifteen years of leading national and international research on principal health and wellbeing.

Can you think of yourself as a “good principal” or even “adequate” if you are spending less time on tasks associated with leading teaching and learning, because your time is taken up with administrative tasks, many of which are insultingly low level, because ‘the system’ does not trust you to do your job to the best of your ability. Neoliberal education systems are to blame for this. They promote competition rather than collaboration and schools live and die by league tables of NAPLAN and VCE results. These are then picked up by the media who created their own league tables to compare schools on simplistic outcome measures. This feeds into parental anxiety about school choice, because the worry is that they might pick the wrong school. There should be no such thing as the wrong school. We will not see much improvement until every parent is confident that their child is at the best school for them, which is local, accessible and welcoming. This is the model that Finland adopted for their population. Doesn't every child have to succeed? Why have we persisted with the neoliberal ideal that competition is king and see schools as places that produce winners and losers? These questions need answers

These system-level pressures do not exist in isolation. When principals are chronically overloaded, constrained in their professional judgement, and unable to focus on the moral

core of their role, schools become more brittle environments. In such conditions, trust erodes and conflict escalates. The rise in violence directed at school leaders cannot be separated from this wider systemic failure.

Every year we hear horror stories from principals about the behaviour of parents. Violence resulting in hospital visits by the victim are becoming more regular. And the slow burn of continuously experiencing violence takes a toll on everyone who is in the vicinity of an incident. This is called vicarious trauma. Principals are required to keep all members of the community safe and it is difficult to protect children and school staff from vicarious trauma if acts of violence by parents occur inside the school playground. So, some schools have had to restrict parent access with designated drop-off and pick-up zones beyond which parents are not welcome. This is designed to protect every member of the school community but comes at the obvious cost of community building. While this is a sad way of dealing with the immediate problem of school violence, it is entirely understandable from the leaders' point of view. Safety first must be the priority.



Research Partner Testimonials

Reflection from the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA)

APPA has long understood that principal wellbeing is fundamental to leading schools well. Over time, there has been growing recognition across the sector that the health, safety and wellbeing of school leaders directly influences school culture, staff retention and student outcomes. What once sat as anecdotal evidence, often easy for systems to dismiss, has now been rigorously documented through longitudinal data.

Our sustained commitment to the survey reflects its critical role in making the invisible visible. The survey provides robust evidence of the pressures principals face and the cumulative impact of those pressures over time. While it is deeply concerning that the data continues to show high levels of risk, the survey has been essential in shifting the conversation from isolated individual experiences to a systemic issue that demands systemic solutions. Sadly, despite the strength of this evidence, meaningful and sustained improvement from systems remains limited, which only reinforces the importance of continuing this work.

Principal voice is data. This survey captures the lived experience of principals across the country and documents the reality of the role as it is actually being enacted. At times, the findings are confronting and uncomfortable to read, but that discomfort should be met with compassion and responsibility, not discounting or deflection.

The value of the survey lies in its ability to elevate principals' experiences beyond individual stories and present them as a collective, national voice. It challenges narratives that frame wellbeing concerns as issues of personal capacity or resilience and instead positions them as reflections of job design, system expectations and resource constraints. The survey asks the system to listen—and to respond.

School leadership has changed significantly. Emotional labour has increased markedly. Compliance and accountability demands have expanded without corresponding growth in administrative support. At the same time, principals are leading communities experiencing rising levels of mental health complexity among students, families and staff, while access to specialist support has not kept pace...

Angela Falkenberg, President of APPA

Reflection from the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

For 15 years, the *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey* has provided the critical evidence base needed to turn anecdotal concern into actionable policy. ASPA has steadfastly supported this survey because we believe that healthy, effective school leadership is the foundation of a flourishing public education system.

Our commitment is sustained by the reality our members face daily. As the national voice for government secondary school leaders, we see firsthand the increasing complexity of the role. This survey has been instrumental in documenting the shift from educational administration to complex community leadership, validating the pressures of violence, workload, and emotional intensity that principals navigate.

The survey's greatest value lies in its independence and longevity. It gives principals a trusted national voice, transforming individual experiences into a collective call to action. The data has been vital for our advocacy, directly informing initiatives like our *2025 Policy Briefing*, where principal wellbeing is a central pillar for reform. This advocacy has resulted in tangible results, including the establishment of the National Principals' Reference Group, and the inclusion of measures and policies specifically aimed at sustaining and retaining principals and school leaders in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, and strategic plans of state and territory education departments across Australia, all reliably informed by the data collected in the survey.

Looking ahead, we hope the next 15 years move beyond diagnosis to cure. We want to see the survey's findings drive systemic changes that reduce administrative burden and restore the joy of educational leadership. We remain proud partners in this essential work.

Andy Mison, President of ASPA



Survey Champion Testimonials



Participating in this long-term survey has always felt both a privilege and a responsibility. In the early years, I felt honoured to contribute to a clearer, more honest picture of school leadership in Australia. Before stepping into principalship, I completed my Master of Educational Leadership at ACU which gave me trust in the university's work and strengthened my commitment to participating in the research. I love being a teacher and I have poured my whole heart into this

career, striving to make a meaningful difference for the children in my care and the staff I lead. Like many school leaders, I present a steady public face to support my community, knowing that maintaining their confidence is an essential part of the role.

This survey has allowed our "inside voices" to be heard, those reflections on wellbeing, workload and the emotional demands of leadership that we often keep to ourselves. It has captured the realities of

the role in a way no individual could, giving Principals a national voice and elevating our experiences into meaningful conversations within our educational systems. Hearing the findings referenced in mainstream media and watching staff wellbeing gradually become part of our conversations, when it was once a topic we tended to keep to ourselves, has been genuinely encouraging.

*Female, Catholic
Secondary NSW*

Over fifteen years, the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey has transformed principal wellbeing from an individual journey into a documented, system-level concern achieving policy response.

The survey findings have profoundly influenced how I approach my own sustainability and that of my staff. For Principals to obtain national data on workload intensification, role complexity, and mental health challenges validates individual experiences while demonstrating these are structural issues, not personal failings. This evidence has empowered Principals, systems and associations to advocate more confidently for reasonable boundaries, additional

support structures, and both understanding and realistic expectations within school communities and with policymakers and system authorities.

The survey's greatest value lies in providing principals a collective voice. Individual principals may struggle to be heard, but aggregated national data commands attention from policymakers, education departments, and the broader public. The longitudinal nature captures evolving challenges—from accountability pressures to pandemic recovery to technological disruption—creating an invaluable historical record of Australian school leadership.

Male, Independent Primary SA





I believe that Wellbeing is super important in schools and in life. For Principals to lead well they need to make sure they have a handle on their own wellbeing, and also work with staff and students on their wellbeing.

I am a member of [Principals' association] – and support the work they do to look out for the Principal class in schools across the nation...So I have seen at the higher level what impact these survey results are having on our system. They are getting people talking, and things are starting to come through in the documents and plans. Now we need to see it make a difference in the data and in the lives of principals.

Personally – it is fascinating to have the longitudinal info over a number of years. I can track what is going on in my personal and professional life, see patterns, understand myself better and make adjustments to my life to make it better.

I often recommend other people participate – especially Associate and Deputy Principals. It was a surprise to see how my data changed when I moved from an Associate Principal into a Principal role. However, on reflection it probably wasn't a surprise, it was expected.

Female, Government WA

2. SNAPSHOT OF 2025 SCHOOL LEADERS

In 2025, 2044 participants took part in the survey, compared to 2182 in 2024. Of those 2044, 79% were returning participants, and 21% are new participants. Around 89% of survey participants are currently serving in a principal class role. The remainder represents school leaders who are retired, on leave, have left a principal class role but remain in education, or have left the education sector entirely. These participants still take part in a shortened version of the survey. As part of our report on our 15th year of data collection, we concentrate on the aggregated results of school leaders from 2011, 2025, and specific years along the survey timeline. We report aggregated data at demographic grouping levels. We do not report specific sub-groups due to insufficient sample size to maintain participant anonymity.

2.1 School Demographics

The 2025 survey provided the following school demographic breakdowns for Australian school leaders, with comparisons to the same demographics in 2011 included:

1. School sector (Figure 2.1.1)
2. School type (Figure 2.1.2)
3. School state (Figure 2.1.3)

School Leader School Sector Distribution 2011 VS 2025

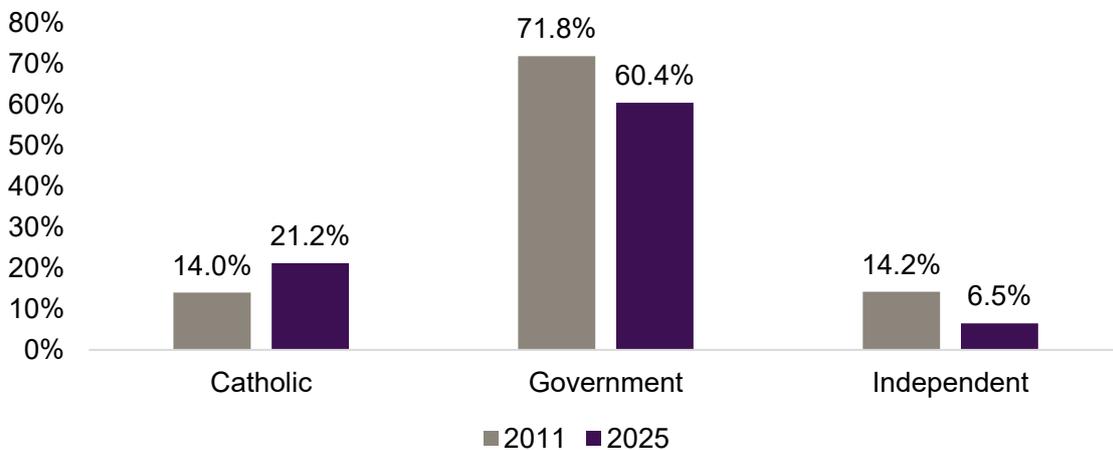


Figure 2.1.1: School Leader School Sector Distribution 2011 & 2025

Note: Percentages add up to less than 100% as not all school leaders provided demographic information, and partial completions are included.

School Leader School Type Distribution 2011 VS 2025

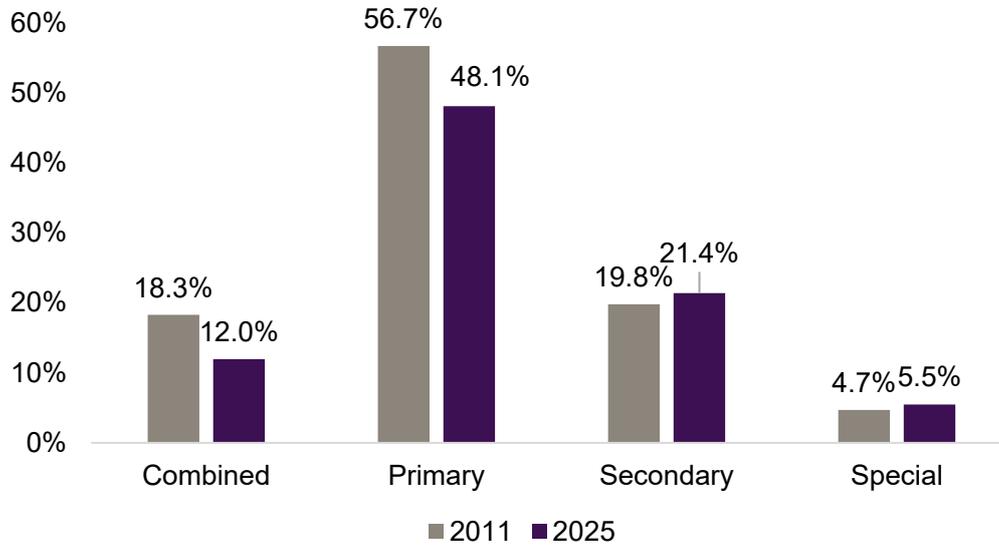


Figure 2.1.2: School Leader School Type Distribution 2011 & 2025

School Leader School State Distribution 2011 VS 2025



Figure 2.1.3: School Leader School State Distribution for 2011 & 2025

For school location, a direct comparison is not possible. Different classifications of geographic location were used in 2011 compared to 2025, so they are here presented as two separate figures. Figure 2.1.4 shows the classification in the 2011 data, while Figure 2.1.5 shows the classification in the 2025 data.

School Leader School Geographic Location Distribution 2011

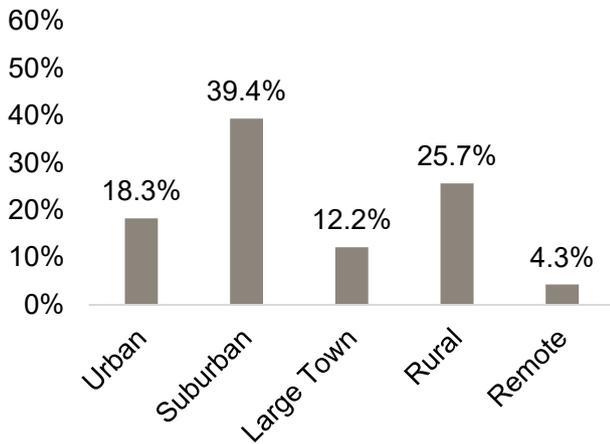


Figure 2.1.4: School Leader School Location Distribution 2011

School Leader School Geographic Location Distribution 2025

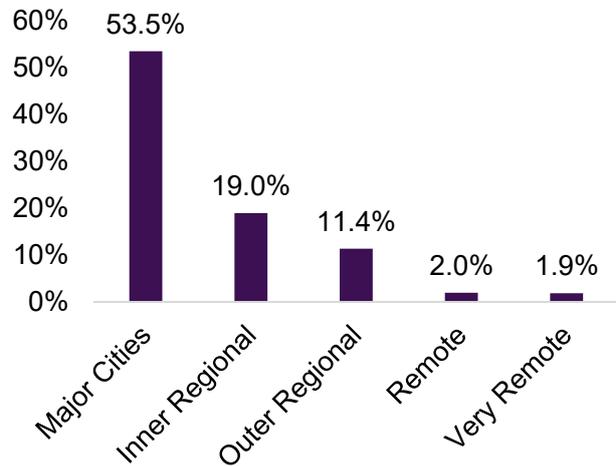


Figure 2.1.5: School Leader School Location Distribution 2025

2.2 Participant Demographics

The 2025 survey also provided the following participant demographics among all school leaders, with comparisons to the same demographics in 2011 included:

1. Role distribution (Figure 2.2.1)
2. Age distribution (Figure 2.2.2) Current school leaders' age ranges from 30 to 78 in 2025, while it ranged from 24 to 75 in 2011. The average age was 53.8 in 2025 and 51.3 in 2011.
3. Gender distribution (Figure 2.2.3)

School Leader Role Distribution 2011 VS 2025

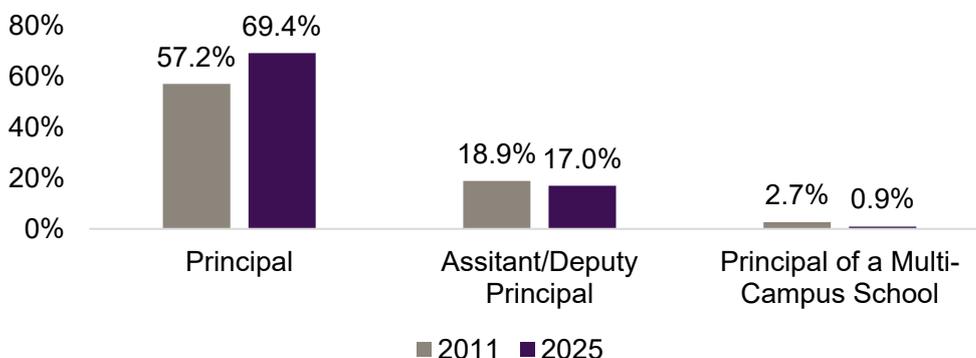


Figure 2.2.1: School Leader Role Distribution 2011 & 2025

School Leader Age Distribution 2011 VS 2025

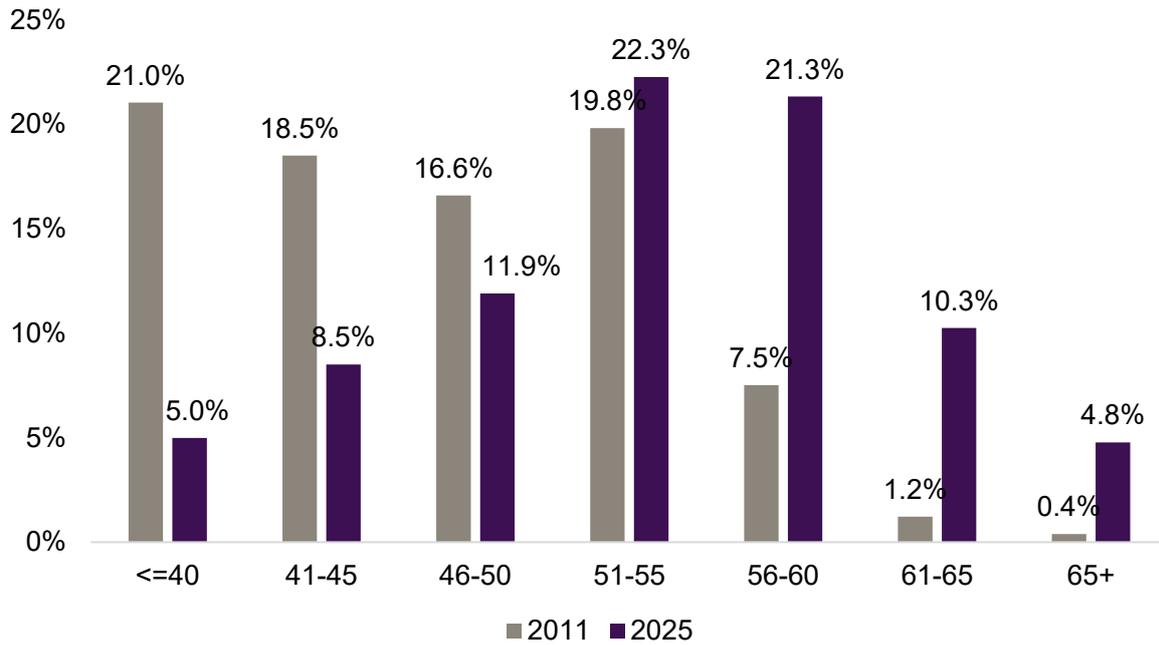


Figure 2.2.2: School Leader Age Distribution 2011 & 2025

School Leader Gender Distribution 2011 VS 2025

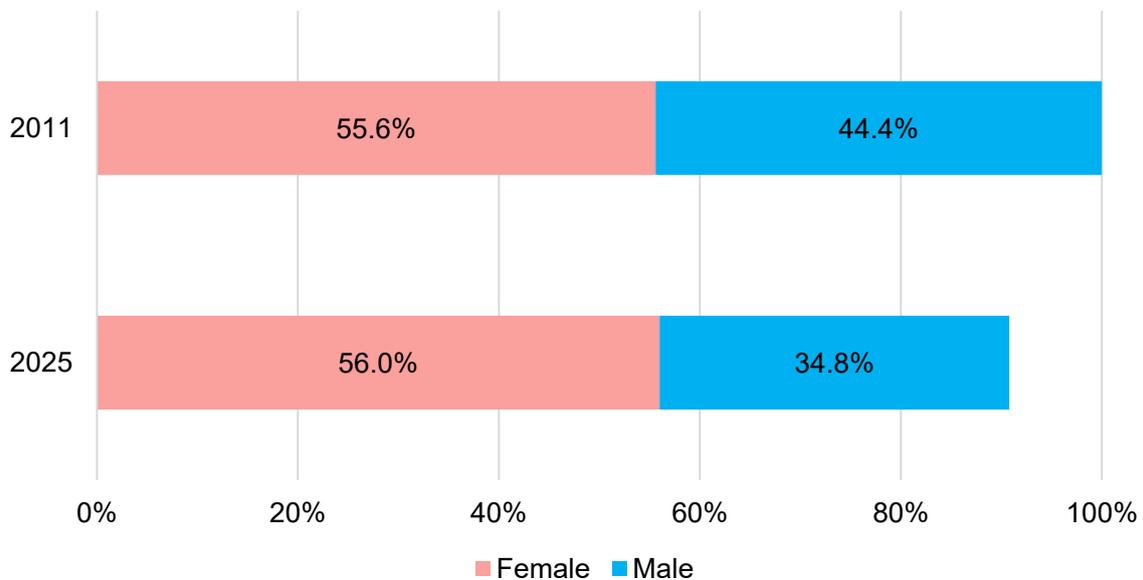


Figure 2.2.3: School Leader Gender Distribution 2011 & 2025

3. THE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED

During 2025, Australian school leaders worked an average of 53.9 hours per week during term time and 19.6 hours per week during school holidays. In 2011 school leaders worked an average of 55.5 hours per week during term time and 26.4 hours per week during school holidays. Among school leader demographic groups, we have the following breakdown for average hours worked per week during term (and holidays) in 2025:

1. Females = 53.7 (20.4); Males = 54.2 (18.3)
2. Primary = 53.1 (18.4); Secondary = 54.7 (19.0); Combined = 56.6 (25.3); Special = 51.6 (19.0)
3. Government = 53.2 (17.9); Catholic = 54.7 (21.1); Independent = 56.3 (30.2)

Below we include the distribution of those school leaders working specific ranges of hours during term time for 2011, 2018, and 2025 (Figure 3.1.1).

School Leader Average Hours Worked Per Week During Term Over Time

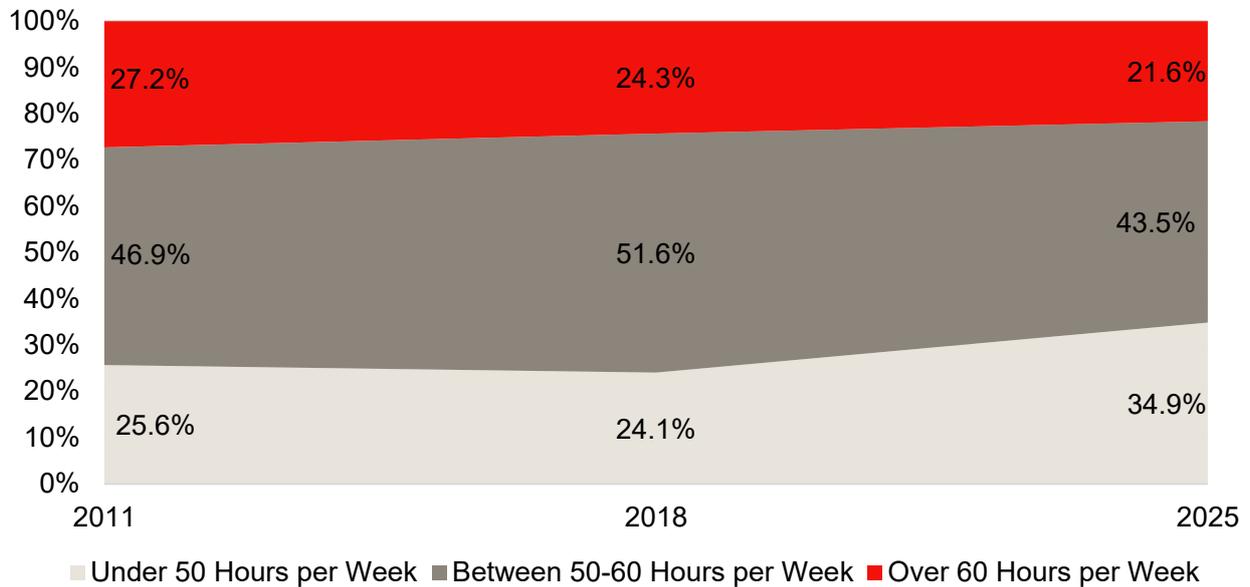


Figure 3.1.1: Average Hours Worked Per Week During School Term Over Time



Report Focus

Since 2011, average hours worked per week during term time has remained steady, but the overall percentage working above average hours has declined.

Survey Champion Testimonial



I have continued to participate in the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey because it consistently reflects the lived reality of school leadership. Over time, the survey has helped me pause and take stock of my own wellbeing. The findings have reinforced the importance of sustainable leadership practices, realistic workloads, and creating conditions where staff feel safe, supported, and able to do their best work. Participation in the survey has influenced how I approach workload management, conversations about wellbeing, and the systems we put in place to support staff through increasingly complex demands.

The value of this long-term survey lies in its ability to give principals a credible national voice. School leaders often operate under intense pressure, and without data, those pressures can be misunderstood or minimised. The survey provides evidence that supports advocacy, informs policy discussions, and ensures that wellbeing is recognised as central to effective school leadership and student outcomes.

Male, Government Primary ACT

4. SOURCES OF STRESS AND CONCERN

4.1 Sources of Stress

In 2025, Sheer Quantity of Work remains the highest source of stress for school leaders and Lack of Time to Focus on Teaching and Learning remains the second highest source of stress (Figure 4.1.1). Parent Related Issues as a source of stress increased from 6th in 2024 to 4th in 2025. Teacher Shortages fell in ranking again to 10th in 2025, down from 7th in 2024^[3], continuing the reversal first noted in 2023^[4].

All School Leaders Mean Source of Stress Scores 2025



Figure 4.1.1: Mean Scores for the Sources of Stress All School Leaders 2025

While the top sources of stress have remained relatively stable since 2011, there have been some changes over time. Figure 4.1.2 shows the mean score for the top sources of stress in 2025 over time going back to 2011. Teacher Shortages as a source of stress is also included to highlight its changes over time. All the top sources of stress have increased slightly since 2011, and Mental Health Issues of Staff has shown a greater proportional increase since 2011 than the other top sources of stress in 2025. On the other hand, all of the top sources of stress have a lower mean score compared to 2024.

It is worth noting that certain other sources of stress such as Expectations of the Employer have also fallen in their ranking like Teacher Shortages, as this was 4th in 2021, but is now 8th. At the same time, the top ten sources of stress all have a mean score above 6 out of 10, indicating they all cause considerable stress to school leaders.

Top Sources of Stress Over Time All School Leaders

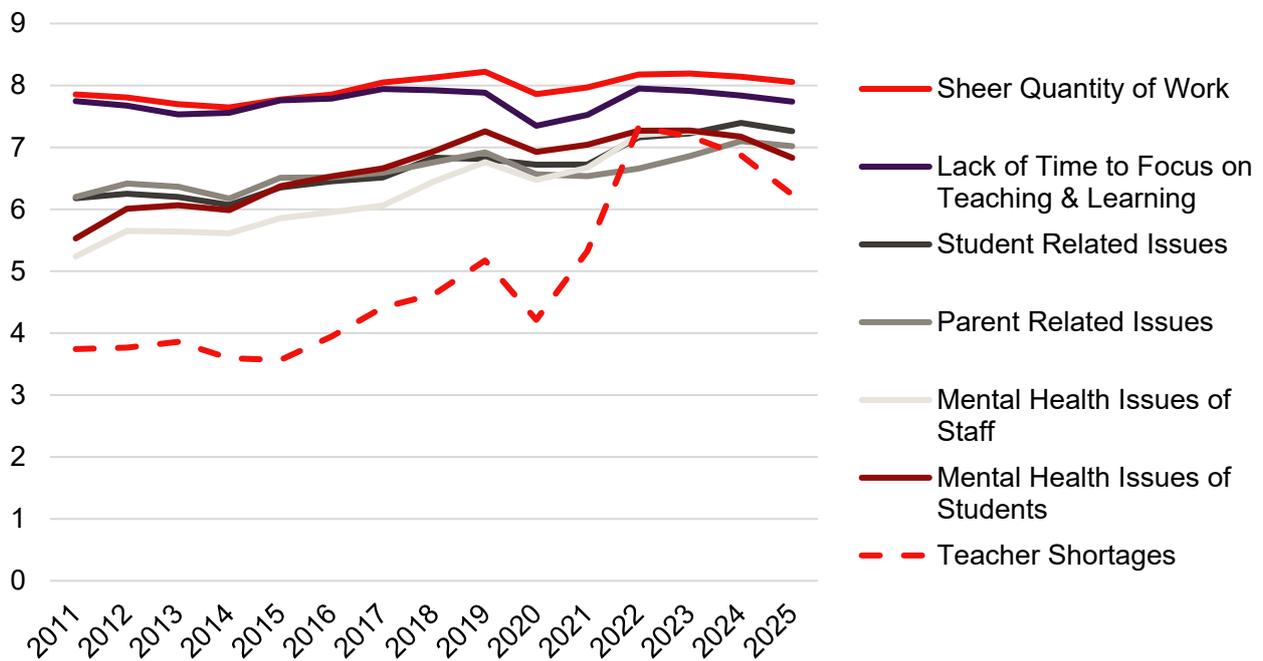


Figure 4.1.2: Mean Scores for the Top Sources of Stress in 2025 All School Leaders Over Time



Report Focus

No other source of stress has changed more than Teacher Shortages since 2011, and Sheer Quantity of Work has been the top source of stress for all 15 years of data collection.

4.2 Sources of Concern

School leaders were asked to rate various factors for student and staff wellbeing on how much of a source of concern they represented to them. Ratings are given from 1 to 5 with 5 being the greatest level of concern. Table 4.2.1 shows the top five rated sources of concern in 2025.

For student wellbeing, Challenges Experienced by Those with Neurological and Complex Conditions is 1st, up from 2nd in 2024^[3] and 3rd in 2023^[4]. As a result, Mental Health and Behavioural Problems have been shifted down in rank. This is unlikely to indicate any significant shift in school leader thinking but represents the biggest difference in these rankings since they were first asked in 2023^[4].

Table 4.2.1: Top Five Sources of Concern for both Student and Staff Wellbeing All School Leaders 2025

Rank	Student Wellbeing Concern	Staff Wellbeing Concern
1	Challenges Experienced by Those with Neurological and Complex Conditions	Excessive Workload
2	Mental Health	Mental Health
3	Behavioural Problems	Emotional Distress
4	Family/Domestic Issues	Conflict
5	School Avoidance	Caring Responsibilities

This job is getting harder every year. There is a lot of talk about the challenges but very little action to reduce the cognitive and emotional load Principals are having to bear.

Female, Catholic Secondary VIC



For staff wellbeing, Excessive Workload remains the biggest source of concern. This echoes Sheer Quantity of Work being ranked as the greatest source of stress for school leaders.

Mental Health being 2nd for both student and staff wellbeing emphasises its importance as factor in promoting a cohesive and positive school environment.



Report Focus

From 2023 to 2025, the top five sources of concern for staff wellbeing have remained relatively unchanged. While the exact scoring may differ, the order of the top five has stayed consistent over the three years among all school leaders

Reflection from the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association (ACPPA)

The Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association was motivated to support the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey to highlight the increasing complexity of the principal role and ensure these realities were clearly understood across the education sector. Our commitment has been sustained by the strength of the emerging data and the survey's capacity to track trends over time, providing valuable longitudinal insights. The long term data has been instrumental in establishing a credible, evidence based platform for informed conversations, advocacy, and decision making that support principal wellbeing across jurisdictions and systems. This long term survey provides principals with a trusted national voice, using robust data to clearly articulate the realities and wellbeing impacts of the role across diverse jurisdictions and governance structures. It enables more informed decision making and supports stronger, more consistent approaches to supporting school leaders nationwide. Over the next 15 years, we hope to see survey findings consistently embedded in policy development and resource allocation, ensuring principals are better supported in their increasingly complex roles and that this support leads to tangible, positive wellbeing outcomes.

ACPPA Executive Team

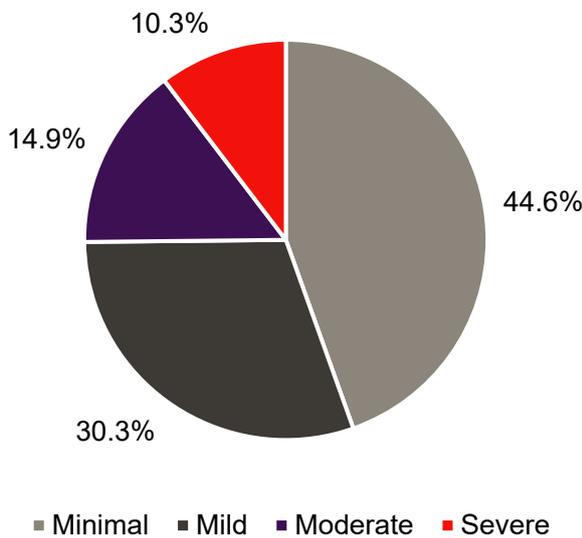


5. MENTAL HEALTH

5.1 GAD-7 (Generalised Anxiety Disorder)

The GAD-7 is a clinically recognised measure of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)^[5-7]. Scores on the 7-item scale range from 0 to 21. Scores of 0 to 4 reflect minimal anxiety, 5 to 9 mild anxiety, 10 to 14 moderate anxiety, and 15+ severe anxiety. Below are the results for 2025 participants based on their category and overall score (Figure 5.1.1). Across all school leaders, 10.3% received a ‘Severe’ score on the GAD-7. As part of our report focus, results from 2023–2025 are shown in Figure 5.1.2. This figure shows the percentage of school leaders receiving a ‘Severe’ score over those three years. The GAD-7 was only introduced into the survey in 2023, so we do not have data from before this point. The percentage with a ‘Severe’ score has increased slightly since 2023, as has the overall mean score (5.6 in 2023 to 6.5 in 2025).

2025 GAD-7 Anxiety Category Distribution



GAD-7 Percentage with a 'Severe' Score 2023-2025

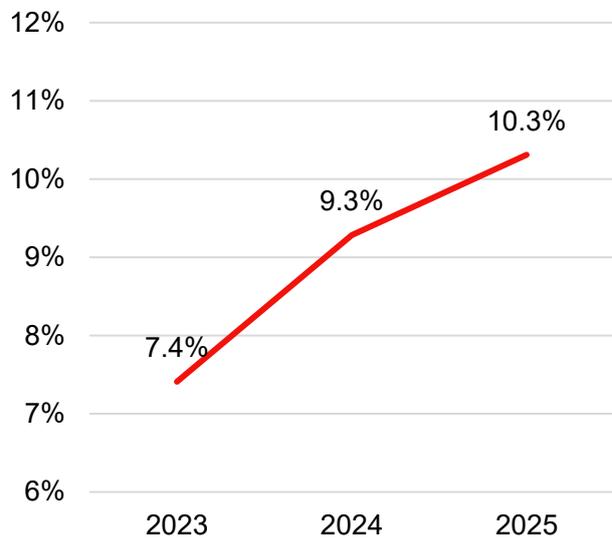


Figure 5.1.1: GAD-7 Anxiety Category Distribution All School Leaders 2025

Figure 5.1.2: GAD-7 Percentage with a 'Severe' Score All School Leaders 2023–2025

Ranges of support that are specifically targeted for Principals / School Administrators are very few and far between. Principals across a range of schools in my network and collegial group continue to find themselves in Catch 22 situations that insidiously eat away at the capacity and the mental health of myself and colleagues. Less people are applying for higher level Principal roles for a reason - it's not worth the hit on our health and wellbeing. Until we have greater accessibility to quality support measures - the decline in numbers of educators prepared to take on these challenging roles will continue.

Male, Government Primary WA



5.2 PHQ-9 (Depression)

The PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item measure of depression) is another clinically recognised measure we added to the survey in 2023^[8, 9]. PHQ-9 scores range from 0 to 27 (0 to 4 reflect minimal depression, 5 to 9 mild depression, 10 to 14 moderate depression, 15 to 19 moderately severe depression, and 20+ severe depression^[8]). Below are the results for 2025 participants based on their category and overall score (Figure 5.2.1). In 2025, 8.2% of school leaders received a ‘Severe’ score or a score of 15+. Looking at results since 2023 (Figure 5.2.2), the percentage of school leaders receiving a ‘Severe’ score, has risen slightly.

2025 PHQ-9 Depression Category Distribution

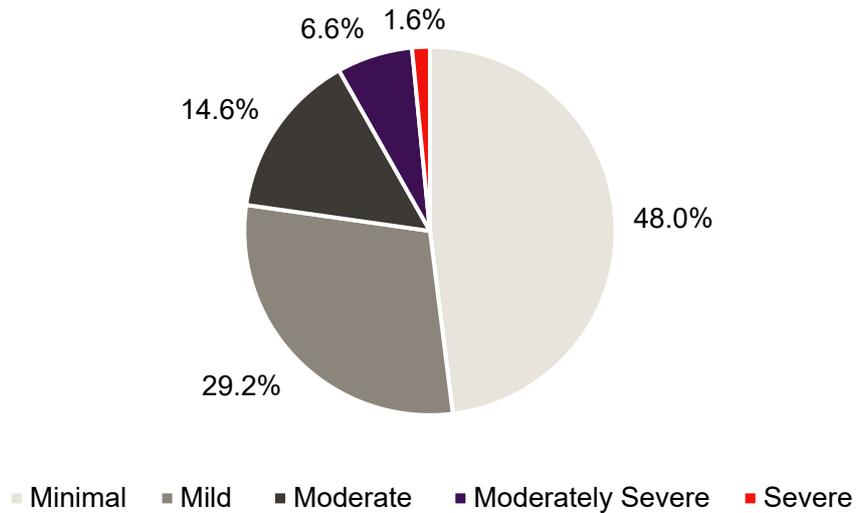


Figure 5.2.1: PHQ-9 Depression Anxiety Category Distribution All School Leaders 2025

PHQ-9 Percentage with a 'Severe' Score 2023-2025

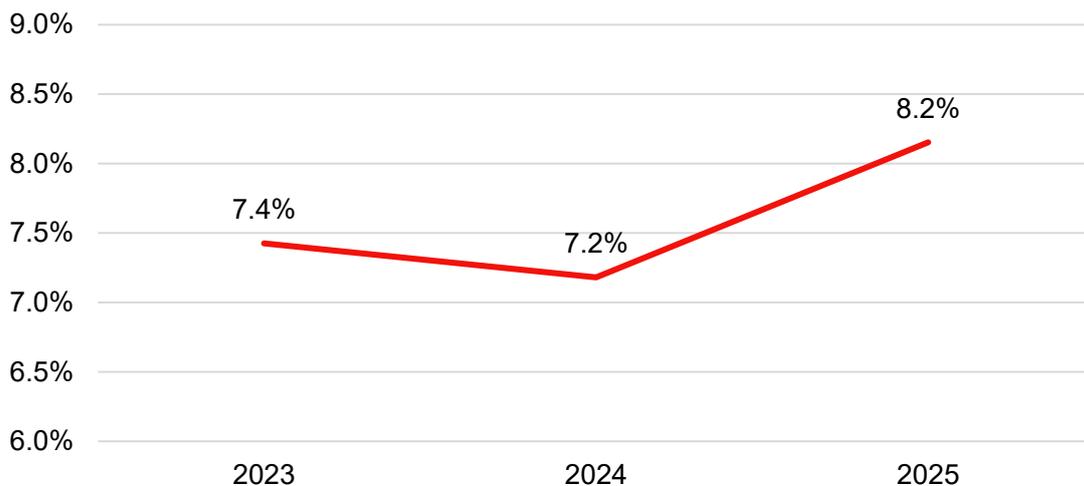


Figure 5.2.2: PHQ-9 Percentage with a ‘Severe’ Score All School Leaders 2023–2025



Reflection from Catholic Secondary Principals Australia (CaSPA)

Catholic Secondary Principals Australia (CaSPA) is the national peak body for Australian Catholic Secondary School Principals. Our longstanding support of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey is due to its alignment with our objectives to contribute to the development of national education policy and practice in Australia and to support the professional development of principals of Catholic secondary schools and others. The survey guides our efforts in advocacy to improve Principal's working conditions. In an era of evidence based approaches to improvement, this survey provides the data to support what we have anecdotally known for a long time now. School leadership has changed over time, never has it been so complex, regulated and called on to address the changes to our society. The survey has documented trends in this change and is helping inform a better future.

Looking ahead, CaSPA would like to see the survey help shape an evidence based renewal of the role of Principal in our schools by:

- being the impetus for collaborative meetings of stakeholders to share insights and effective initiatives already in place
- assisting in the development of Principal Wellbeing Frameworks
- leveraging successful programs and processes already in use and evaluate their outcomes to scale impactful solutions.
- focussing on reducing administrative burdens, a need strongly emphasised in the Productivity Commission Report.

CaSPA congratulates the Health & Wellbeing Team at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University on this highly valued work and look forward to continued collaboration into the future.

Stephen Kennaugh, President of CaSPA

6. PSYCHOSOCIAL OUTCOMES

6.1 Turnover Intention

This simple measure consists of one question first implemented by Spector et al.^[10, 11]. It focuses on the participant’s feelings about their current job by asking the participant whether they agree or disagree with the statement “I often seriously consider leaving my current job”. Responses are on a six-point scale (1 = strongly disagree...6 = strongly agree).

The figures presented here split the responses into a simple agree/disagree binary to facilitate understanding. This question was introduced in 2023, thus as part of our report focus results are shown from 2023 to 2025. Figure 6.1.1 shows the percentage of school leaders that agreed with the statement each year. More than 50% of school leaders agreed with the statement in 2025, and results from previous years show a similar level of agreement. While there have not been significant changes in the level of agreement, this does represent a very high percentage of school leaders expressing some intention of quitting, which suggests a high level of system instability^[12].

Percentage that Agree with Intention to Quit Statement

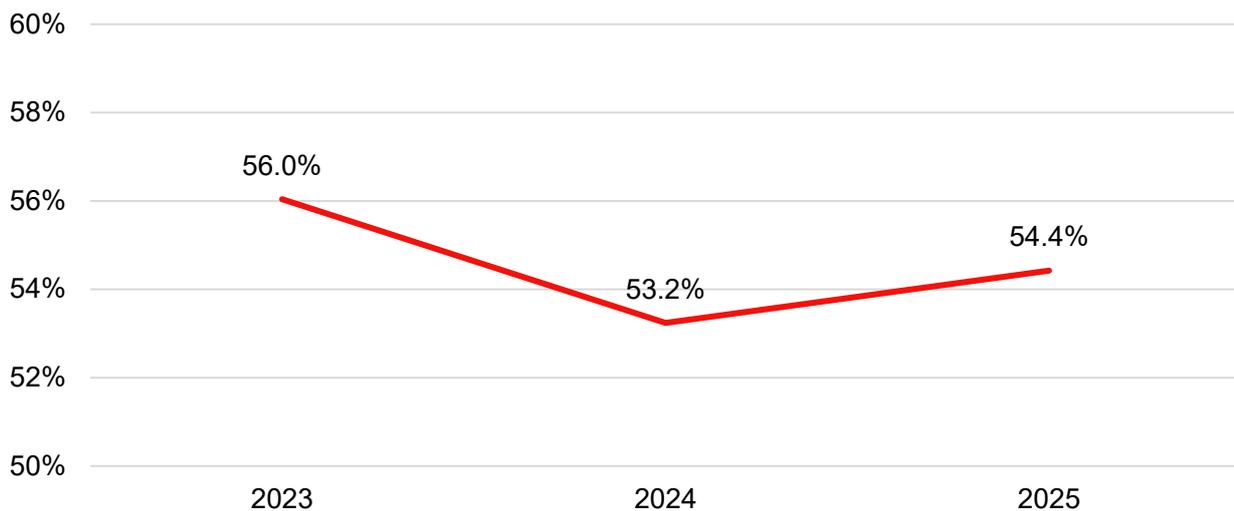


Figure 6.1.1: Percentage of School Leaders that Agreed with the Intention to Quit Statement 2023–2025

It is a wonderful privilege to be the Principal of a school community but the time demands and the expectation are enormous. The challenges of reduced funding combined with growing expectations from all stakeholders make it more and more difficult to meet the demands of the role. I feel close to burnout and am seriously considering resigning and looking for a different role. I am well supported and feel greatly valued but the expectations continue to grow in number and complexity. I am not sure how this will be sustainable for the next generation of principals. Thank you for the opportunity to complete the survey.

Male, Independent Combined NSW



6.2 Brief Resilience Scale

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a measure used to assess a participant’s ability to bounce back from adverse events^[13]. It works on a five-point scale across six items, asking how much the participant agrees to statements such as “I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times”^[13]. The average of the six items generates that participant’s score for the scale. A higher score indicates greater resilience.

The mean scores for all school leaders in the BRS since it was introduced into the survey in 2017 are shown in Figure 6.2.1. Mean scores in the BRS have remained stable since 2017 across all school leaders, with a high average resilience overall given the scale ranges from 1-5. Even though the mean does appear to trend positively over time, the difference is slight and may not be indicative of anything in particular. Overall, the high resilience scores may be evidence of the high coping capacity of school leaders and their motivation to perform their jobs well^[14-16], rather than an indicator of positive conditions.

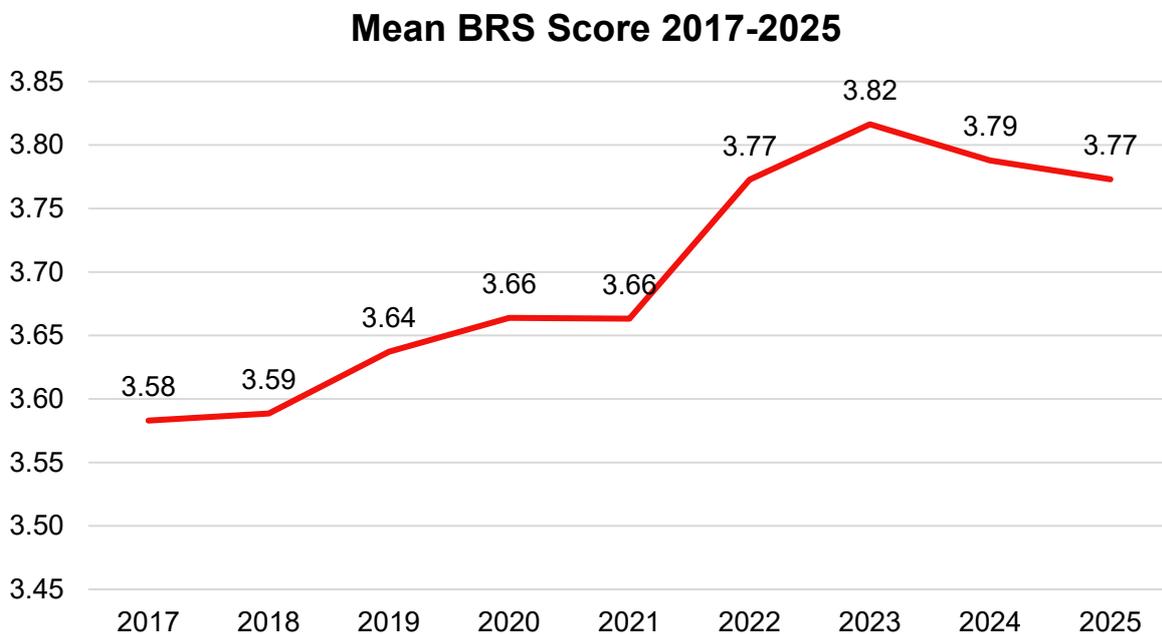


Figure 6.2.1: Mean Score for the BRS All School Leaders 2017–2025

6.3 Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration

A component of Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs Theory is the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration scale^[17, 18]. This scale measures how the participants' psychological needs for Autonomy^[19], Relatedness, and Competence in the workplace are met. In this survey, a specific form of the scale is used that is centred on needs at the workplace. In 2025 it consists of 6 needs satisfaction items and 6 needs frustration items using a seven-point agree/disagree scale. Scores are then averaged across all school leaders for our report.

Results for 2025 are shown in Figure 6.3.1. Autonomy Satisfaction has the lowest mean score over the three needs satisfaction variables, while Autonomy Frustration has the highest mean score of the three needs frustration variables. Autonomy Frustration often functions as a psychological mechanism that links the structural and organisational demands of a role to mental health outcomes^[20].

The Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration Scale has been in the survey in full since 2018. However, results across the three needs for all school leaders have remained relatively stable, with high Autonomy Frustration and slightly reduced Autonomy Satisfaction compared to the other two needs.

2025 Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration

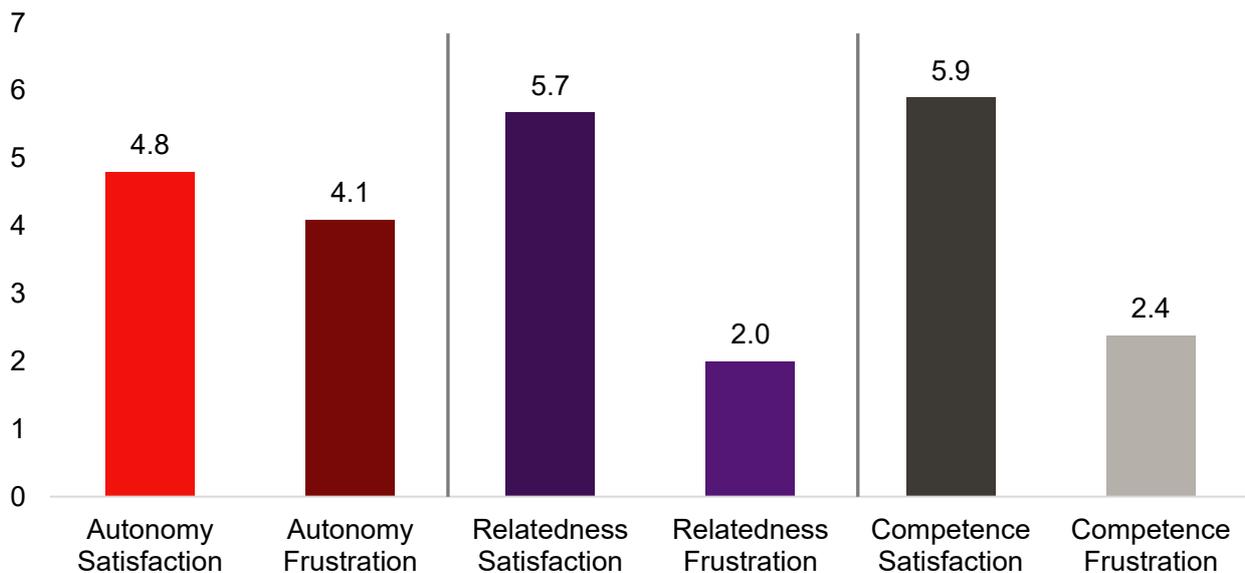


Figure 6.3.1: Mean Scores for the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Frustration All School Leaders 2025



My main concern is the increased workload and lack of autonomy in my role. There are so many expectations on Principals now that we all struggle to keep up to date and so many things that are time consuming seem to be simple 'box ticking' exercises.

Male, Catholic Primary QLD

Reflection from the Victorian Principals Association (VPA)

As President of the Victorian Principals Association, I am proud of our long-standing support for the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey over the past 15 years. From the outset, the survey has provided what school leaders have long needed. That being a credible, national evidence base that captures the realities of principal work and wellbeing over time.

Our continued commitment reflects the survey's integrity and impact. It gives principals a strong collective voice and translates lived experience into robust, longitudinal data that informs policy, advocacy and system improvement. For too long, discussions about principal wellbeing relied on anecdote. This survey has fundamentally shifted that narrative by producing evidence that cannot be ignored. It has been referenced in major reviews of school leadership in Victoria and has directly influenced the development of the Victorian Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the significant supports that have followed. Yet we know more needs to be done!

School leadership today is far more complex than it was 15 years ago. Principals are managing heightened accountability, workforce shortages, rising community expectations and increasingly complex student and family needs. The survey has played a critical role in documenting these pressures, while also highlighting the resilience principals continue to demonstrate. Importantly, it has helped reframe wellbeing as a system responsibility rather than an individual failing. Looking ahead, the next phase of this work must drive stronger prevention, earlier intervention and more sustainable leadership models. Supporting principal wellbeing is not optional. It is fundamental to the health of our schools, the strength of our education system and the future of our nation.

Andrew Dalglish, President of VPA



7. OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR

7.1 Offensive Behaviour Reporting

In 2025, nearly half (47.8%) of school leaders reported being subjected to Physical Violence (Figure 7.1.1). Threats of Violence (53.7%) is also high in 2025. General population benchmarks based on an Australian working population sample are included in Figure 7.1.1 as well, showing only Sexual Harassment and Unpleasant Teasing with a lower percentage among school leaders. Rates of violence at this magnitude would be considered unacceptable in many other professions where safety is critical to the job. Therefore, the rates of exposure to violence and threats for school leaders is a serious concern and a clear call for more to be done.

The percentage of school leaders reporting violent offensive behaviours has changed drastically since the survey's inception in 2011. Figure 7.1.2 shows the percentage reporting Threats of Violence and Physical Violence from 2011–2025. Since 2011, the percentage of school leaders reporting Physical Violence has increased from 27.3% in 2011 to 47.8% in 2025. Similarly, Threats of Violence has increased from 37.9% to 53.7%. 2025 represents the first year since 2020 that the percentage of school leaders reporting these two behaviours has decreased compared to the previous year. In 2024, 54.5% of school leaders reported Threats of Violence, while 49.6% reported Physical Violence. Table 7.1.1 details from whom school leaders that reported each offensive behaviour received those behaviours. It is given as a percentage with 100% being every school leader that reported being subjected to that particular offensive behaviour. School leaders can select multiple options, so percentages across all five sources will add up to more than 100%. Parents are generally the most common source of offensive behaviour, save for in Physical Violence and Threats of Violence where Students were the most common, and Unpleasant Teasing where the five possible sources are spread more evenly.

2025 COPSOQ-III Percentage Reporting Offensive Behaviours

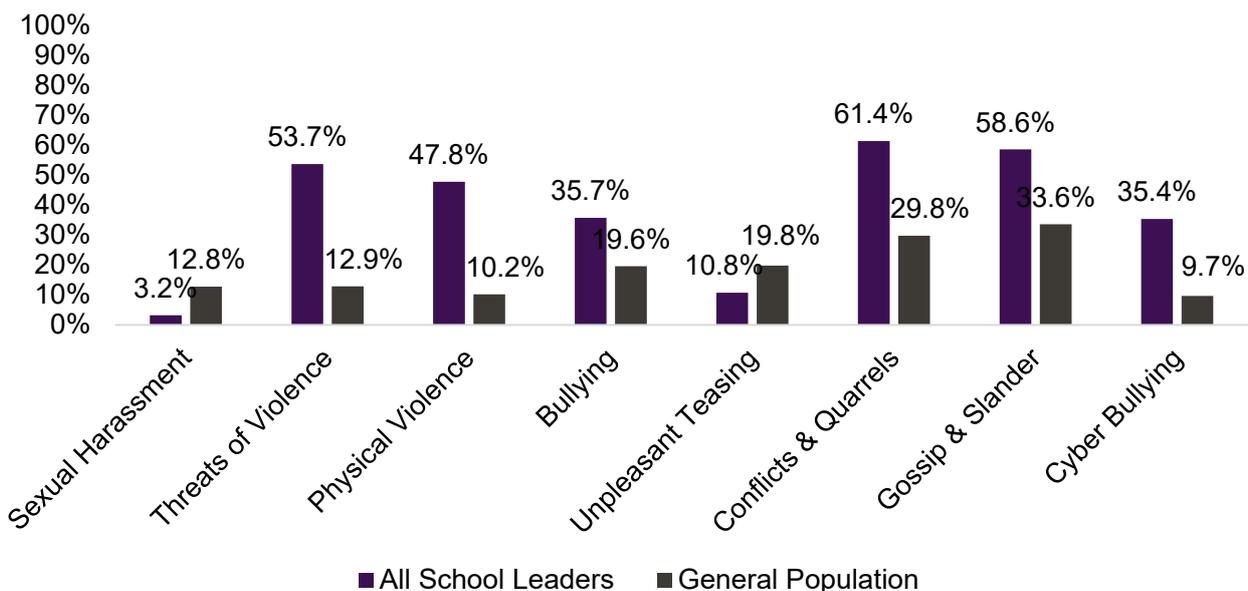


Figure 7.1.1: Percentage Reporting Offensive Behaviours All School Leaders 2025

Table 7.1.1: Frequency of the Different Sources of Each Offensive Behaviour in 2025

Offensive Behaviour	Colleagues	Manager/Superior	Subordinates	Parents	Students
Sexual Harassment	31.6%	7.0%	28.1%	40.4%	29.8%
Threats of Violence	2.3%	0.2%	2.7%	66.1%	75.7%
Physical Violence	0.7%	0.1%	0.8%	18.5%	95.7%
Bullying	23.3%	14.7%	38.7%	56.6%	12.4%
Unpleasant Teasing	34.7%	6.8%	36.3%	31.1%	28.4%
Conflicts & Quarrels	39.2%	11.6%	53.8%	60.7%	28.1%
Gossip & Slander	32.8%	5.1%	46.0%	63.4%	15.0%
Cyber Bullying	4.5%	0.8%	10.1%	89.8%	17.0%

**Percentage Reporting Threats or Physical Violence
2011–2025**

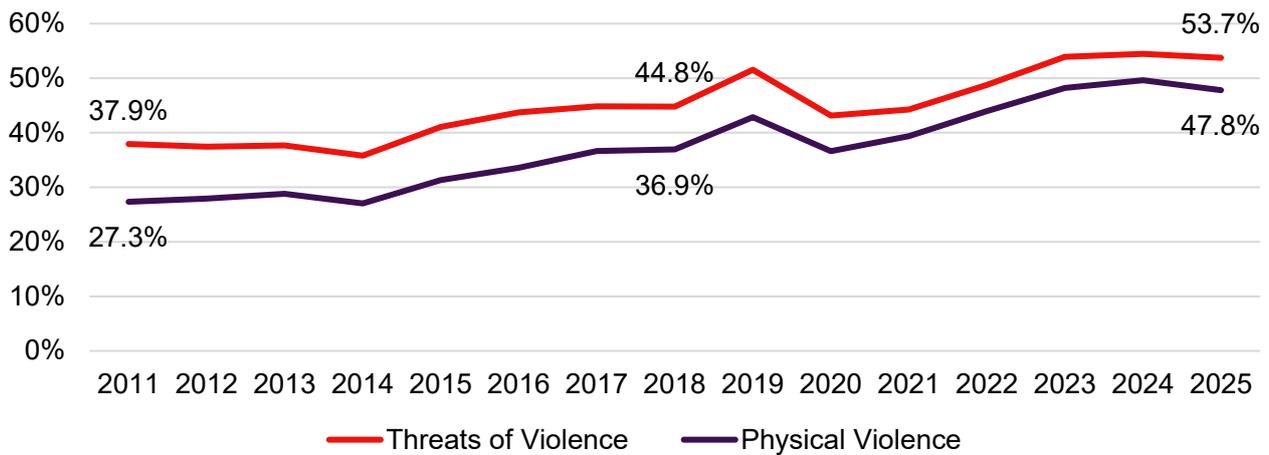


Figure 7.1.2: Percentage Reporting Threats or Physical Violence All School Leaders 2011–2025

When I became a principal I didn't expect to be mired in managing adult behaviour. I thought it would be about instructional leadership and inspiring educators. I didn't realise how I would be subject to manipulation and need to respond like a lawyer - with extreme care and explicit language which leaves no room for interpretation.

I did not expect to get this far in what I thought would be a rewarding career, to now be planning an early exit from education. I'm tired, and feel slightly embarrassed that I used to think the job took kindness and care, not political acumen and self protection writ large.

Female, Government Primary VIC



7.2 Annual Cost of Dealing with Offensive Behaviours

An additional analysis was conducted around offensive behaviours which estimated the cost for school leaders to manage or deal with offensive behaviours. An estimate in terms of individual income and an overall cost to the education sector was estimated. School leaders in the survey reported their yearly income band from <\$50,000 per annum to >\$210,000 per annum. This was used alongside the percentage of their time they reportedly spend dealing with offensive behaviours. A full breakdown of this analysis is available in the recently published IPPE report on offensive behaviours^[2], but the key results are presented here as well.

For school leaders that experienced offensive behaviours, dealing with these behaviours costs on average \$106.5 a day based on the reported time percentage. School leaders that experienced more types of offensive behaviour also carry a greater cost, with school leaders that experienced seven of the eight listed types of offensive behaviour having an average daily cost of \$221.6. This represents a substantial daily cost alongside the loss in productivity from being diverted from normal work tasks. Figure 7.2.1 shows the average daily cost based on the number of offensive behaviours experienced.

Estimated Individual Cost to Manage Differing Numbers of Offensive Behaviours for School Leaders

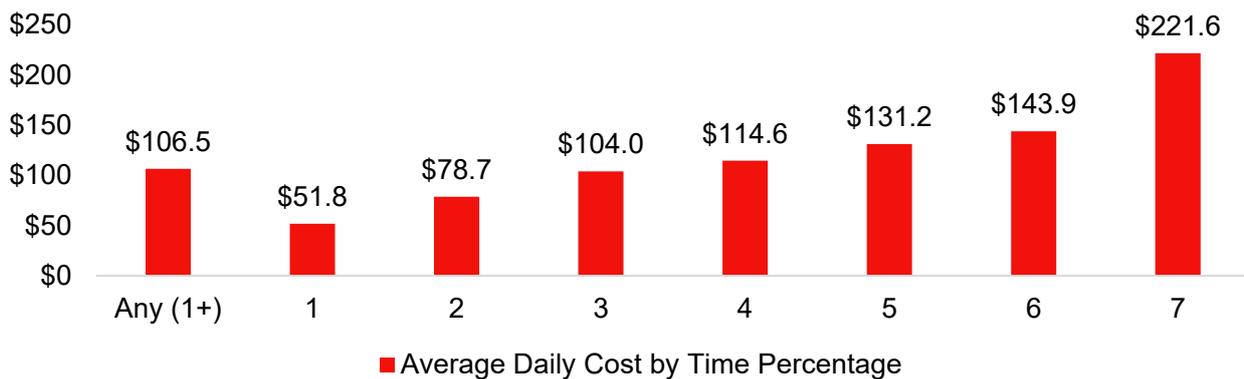


Figure 7.2.1: Estimated Average Daily Individual Cost in Terms of Income for School Leaders to Manage and Respond to Differing Numbers of Offensive Behaviours.

In terms of the annual cost to school leaders, on average it cost \$24,495.1 a year for a school leader experiencing offensive behaviours to deal with them. Those that experienced seven types of offensive behaviour carried an average annual cost of \$50,976.9. If the first annual cost is extrapolated out to cover the 9653 schools registered in Australia in 2024 (ABS)^[21], and the percentage of school leader participants that report offensive behaviours is taken into account (87.2%), it represents an average cost of approximately \$206,229,965 a year to the education sector for school leaders to respond to and manage offensive behaviours. Full details of the calculations behind these figures are found in Appendix E.

It is worth noting that this is a highly conservative estimate, as most schools have more than one school leader. In addition, there are likely additional impacts besides the cost mentioned here. The proportion of time spent dealing with offensive behaviours represents lost hours that could not be spent undertaking other school leadership activities. This could include staff management, professional development, or community engagement.

The table below presents **state-level** estimates of the annual financial cost associated with school leaders managing offensive behaviours in Australian schools. These figures are derived from three inputs:

1. The proportion of school leaders exposed to at least one offensive behaviour in the survey
2. The average annual cost per exposed school leader, calculated based on reported productivity loss due to dealing with offensive behaviours (estimated for each state)
3. The number of school leaders in each state, drawn from the most recent ABS national school data.

For example, the cost for NSW is based on:

- The estimated number of school leaders in NSW (3,132),
- The proportion exposed to at least one offensive behaviour (89%),
- Multiplied by the estimated average annual cost per exposed leader for each state.

Table 7.2.1: State & Territory Breakdown of Estimated Costs of Managing Offensive Behaviours

State/Territory	Estimated Number of School Leaders	Percentage of School Leaders Exposed	Average Annual Cost per Exposed School Leader	Total Estimated State Cost
ACT	138	94.6%	\$34,444	\$4,496,354
NSW	3132	89.1%	\$24,087	\$67,200,372
NT	193	88.9%	\$24,066	\$4,128,708
QLD	1798	93.6%	\$25,886	\$43,563,676
SA	714	88.2%	\$25,428	\$16,019,850
TAS	261	93.5%	\$23,189	\$5,661,972
VIC	2292	86.5%	\$23,915	\$47,420,575
WA	1125	91.2%	\$21,555	\$22,118,490

Important notes for Interpretation

- Differences in total cost between states primarily reflect mainly differences in the number of school leaders, not higher or lower rates of offensive behaviours or severity.
- In fact, the prevalence of offensive behaviours is relatively consistent across states, generally falling within a small range for most types.
- The cost per leader is also similar across jurisdictions, meaning larger states like NSW and Victoria have higher overall totals simply due to scale.
- These are conservative estimates. They rely on self-reported exposure and productivity loss and assume only one school leader per school.

The data are intended to illustrate the scale and systemic impact of offensive behaviours in schools, not to encourage inter-state comparisons or rankings.

8. COPSOQ RESULTS

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-III) presented here is regarded as the 'gold standard' in occupational health and safety self-report measures. It consists of higher-order domains and contributing sub-domains/scales. We^[22, 23] and others^[24-27] have found these measures to be very robust and stable. The following section outlines the scales of what each domain measures. We report the key findings for each domain and its subscales in detail. The domains in this report are Demands at Work; Work Organisation & Job Contents; Interpersonal Relations & Leadership; Work-Individual Interface; and Health & Wellbeing. Offensive Behaviour also forms part of the COPSOQ-III but is reported on in the previous section. The definitions of each of the COPSOQ-III scales within the domains are given in Appendix A.

In keeping with our report focus, we additionally present the differences in COPSOQ-III scale scores in previous years of the survey. Results for 2011, 2018, and 2025 are shown for all scales. Many scales within the COPSOQ-III do not show substantial changes over time, although some do show trends towards both more and less favourable results since 2011.

Overall results for all school leaders in 2025 have several contrasts. School leaders have high demands placed on them, have substantial work-life conflict, and elevated burnout and stress. Yet, they are highly committed to the workplace, feel part of a community, find meaning in their work, and possess strong self-efficacy.

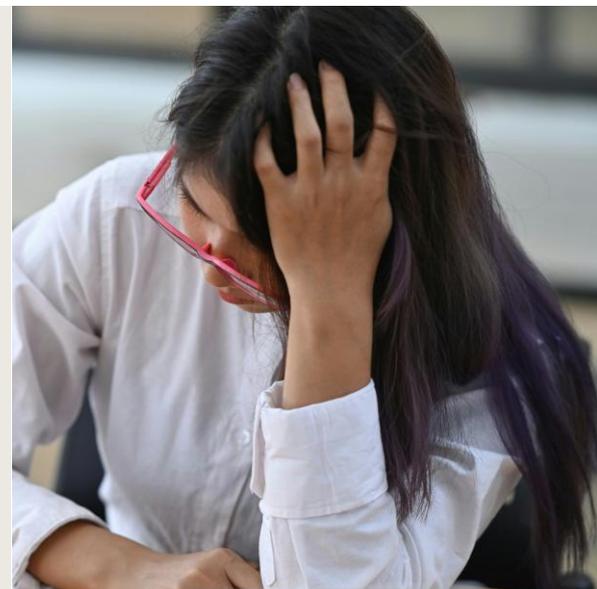
8.1 Demands at Work

The Demands at Work domain covers the various demands, such as time and emotional investment, that are placed upon the participant during their work. For this domain, a higher score indicates less favourable results in that area, except for Cognitive Demands where a lower score indicates less favourable results. In 2025, participants scored less favourably than the general population for almost all scales except for Cognitive Demands. Particularly in the case of Emotional Demands and Demands for Hiding Emotions (Figure 8.1.1).

When looking at changes over time in Figure 8.1.2, Work Pace and Emotional Demands have shown the greatest change, both showing school leaders scoring less favourably for these scales in 2025 compared to 2011 and 2018.

This is the hardest job I have ever done - it is completely consuming. There is very little space in my life for anything else. I know it is impossible to meet all of the demands and expectations on me. Thankfully there are moments of complete joy - that come from watching a student shine or a staff member grow. I also have started to build a team at work who are growing the capability to lean in when we need to get through and I have the world's greatest husband who looks after me - I could never do this without him.

Female, Government Combined NT



Survey Champion Testimonial



As principals we do not often get the time to reflect on our health, safety or wellbeing. Our job is so multi-faceted and our role is around supporting the staff, students and community that we often do not take time for ourselves.

Principals often support each other and the relationships with our peers and colleagues is the main form of support that we receive. I have found that principals are always guilty until found innocent (rarely) when a staff member is unhappy with a decision or feels hard done by.

Participating in this survey makes me take the time to reflect on my year, my own personal experience and my health, safety and wellbeing.

Female, Government Combined QLD

2025 COPSOQ-III Demands at Work Mean Scores All School Leaders & General Population

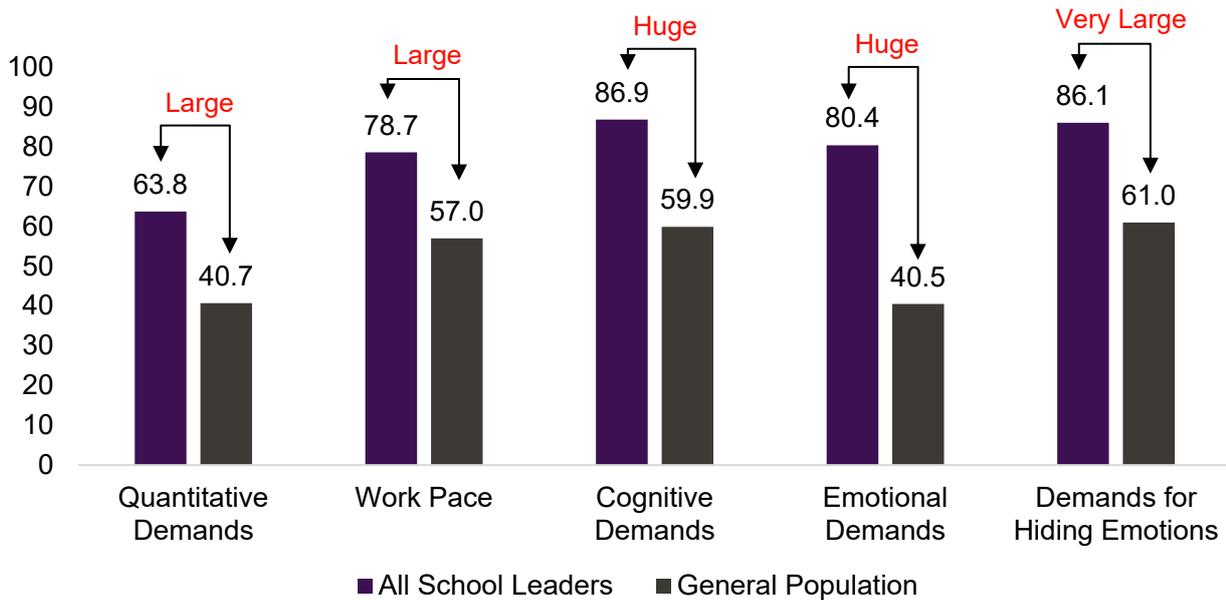


Figure 8.1.1: Demands at Work Mean Scores Comparing All School Leaders to the General Population Using Cohen's d 2025

COPSOQ-III Mean Scores Over Time Demands at Work

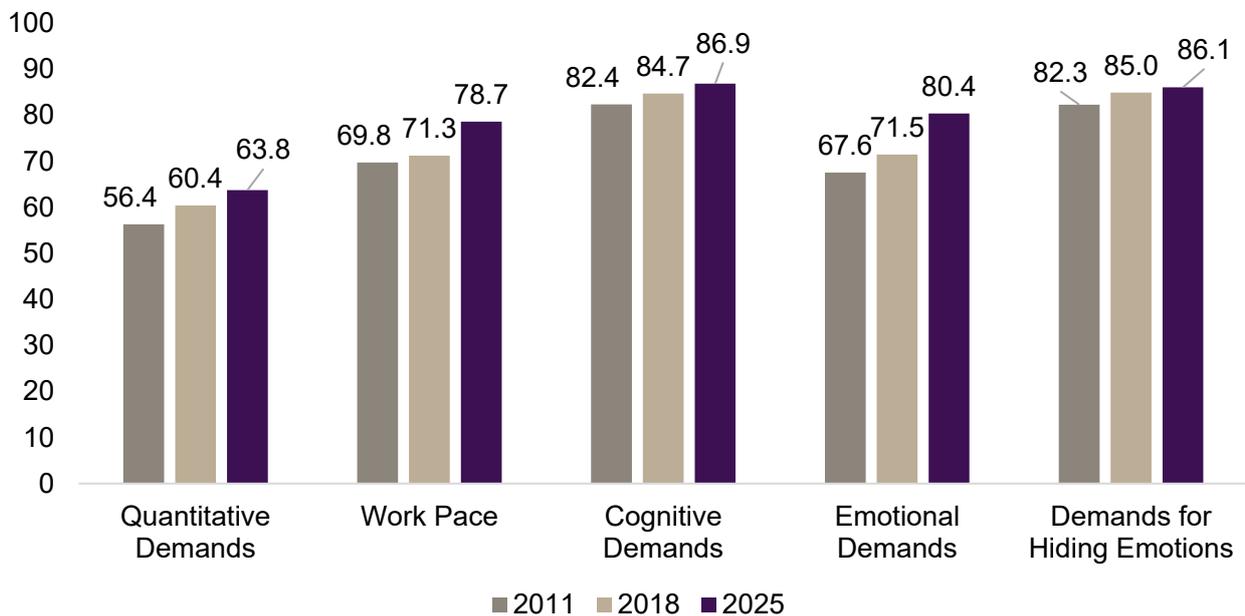


Figure 8.1.2: Demands at Work Mean Scores All School Leaders Over Time

Note: The exact calculations to generate scale scores have been refined over the lifetime of the survey. Cohen's *d* measures effect size or the size of the difference between two means. An exceptionally large effect size (Cohen's *d* > 1) indicates the two means are greater than one standard deviation apart from one another. Very Small ≤ 0.2, Small ≥ 0.2, Medium ≥ 0.5, Large ≥ 0.8, Very large ≥ 1, Huge ≥ 1.2. Only large differences or above are noted by arrows and text in the figures.

8.2 Work Organisation & Job Contents

The Work Organisation & Job Contents domain represents the opportunities the participant encounters during their work. It also covers some of their overall attitudes to their work and workplace. For this domain, a higher score represents more favourable results. In 2024, most scales within this domain have more favourable scores for school leaders compared to the general population scores (Figure 8.2.1). This is particularly the case for the scale of Influence. Figure 8.2.2 shows the mean scores for this domain over time. Some scales such as Influence have more favourable results in 2025 compared to 2011, while other scales such as Possibilities for Development have less favourable results.

2025 COPSOQ-III Work Organisation & Job Contents Mean Scores

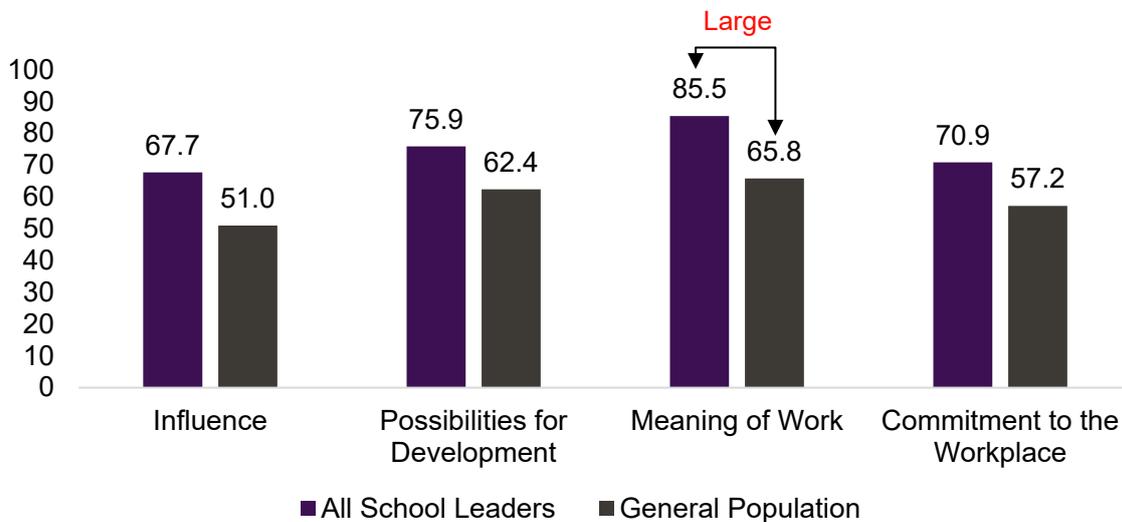


Figure 8.2.1: Work Organisation & Job Contents Mean Scores Comparing All School Leaders to the General Population Using Cohen's d 2025

COPSOQ-III Mean Scores Over Time Work Organisation & Job Contents

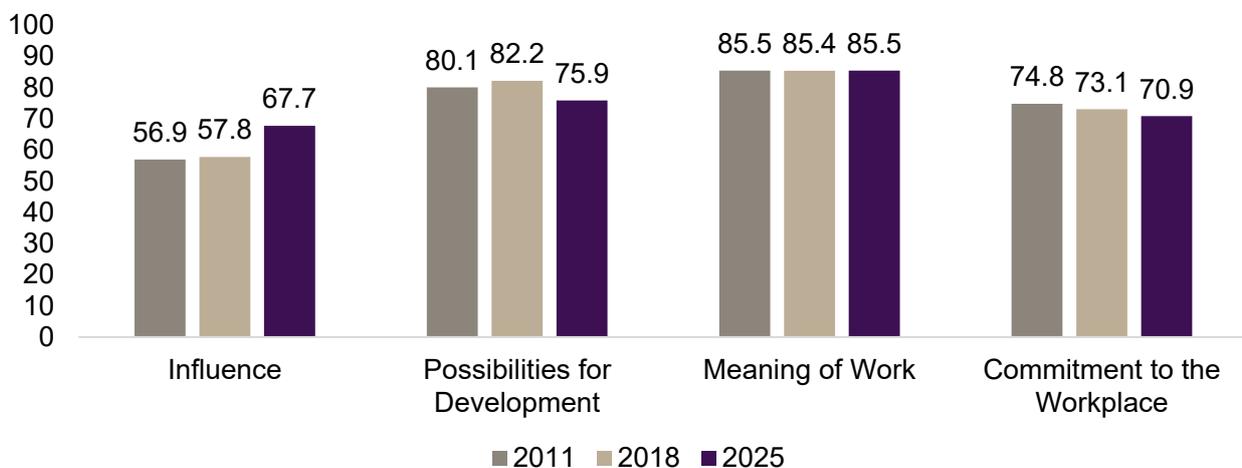


Figure 8.2.2: Work Organisation & Job Contents Mean Scores All School Leaders Over Time

8.3 Interpersonal Relations & Leadership

The Interpersonal Relations & Leadership domain represents the breadth of relationships the participant has in their work. This includes both peer relationships and relationships with management. Almost all scales within this domain have a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. The exception to this is Role Conflict, where a higher score indicates less favourable results. In 2025, school leaders score similarly to the general population for most scales (Figure 8.3.1). School leaders score more favourable for Social Community at Work than the general population.

When looking at results over time as detailed in Figure 8.3.2, scores for most scales have not changed substantially over time.

2025 COPSOQ-III Interpersonal Relations & Leadership Mean Scores

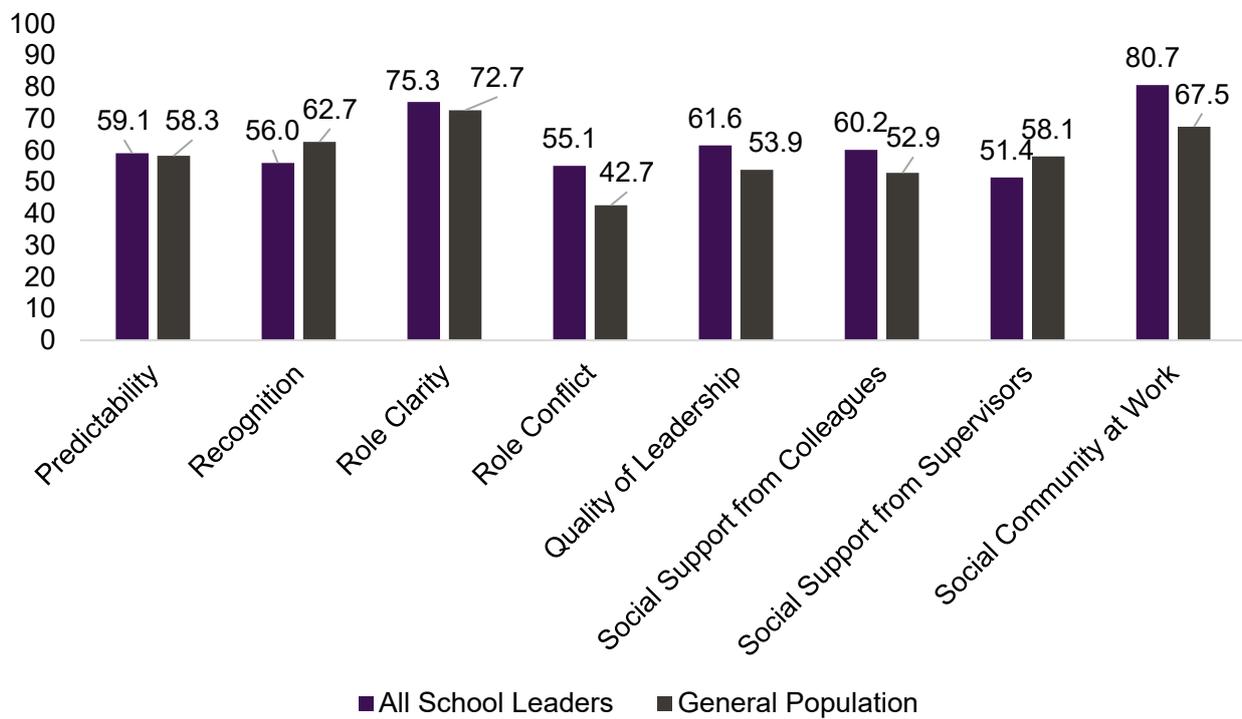


Figure 8.3.1: Interpersonal Relations & Leadership Mean Scores Comparing All School Leaders to the General Population Using Cohen’s d 2025

COPSOQ-III Mean Scores Over Time Interpersonal Relations & Leadership All School Leaders

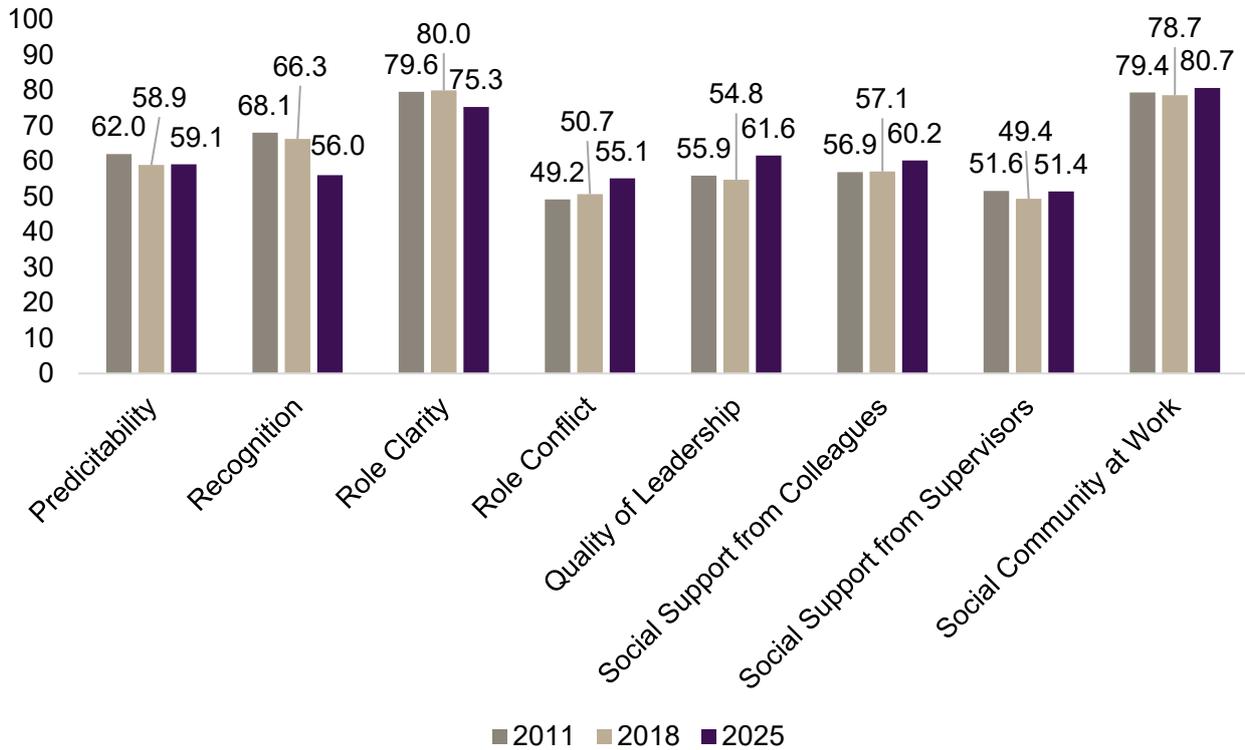


Figure 8.3.2: Interpersonal Relations & Leadership Mean Scores All School Leaders Over Time

I feel as though directives from the Catholic Education Department mean that I have little to no authority in my school. I don't get to choose what to lead, but get told what needs to happen in my school whether our school data reflects this or not. I don't feel as though I am leading ANYTHING and I don't feel as though I can challenge anything without being reprimanded or fear that I won't be considered for other opportunities. I don't feel that enough has been done to help Principals in the current teacher shortage crisis. I work in a small school and I don't have a deputy principal - I find it difficult to take days off when I'm sick or be away from the school. I do like my job, but I want to feel like I'm leading the school and not being told what my specific school priorities are.

Female, Catholic Primary VIC



8.4 Work-Individual Interface

The Work-Individual Interface domain represents the interaction between a participant’s personal life and their job, as well as their overall sense of satisfaction about their job. Two of the three scales in this domain have a higher score indicating less favourable results, while Job Satisfaction has a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. In 2025, school leaders score similarly to the general population for Job Satisfaction, more favourably for Job Insecurity, and less favourably for Work-Family Conflict (Figure 8.4.1). When looking at results over time (Figure 8.4.2), scores for all three scales have become less favourable for school leaders since 2011.

2025 COPSOQ-III Work-Individual Interface Mean Scores

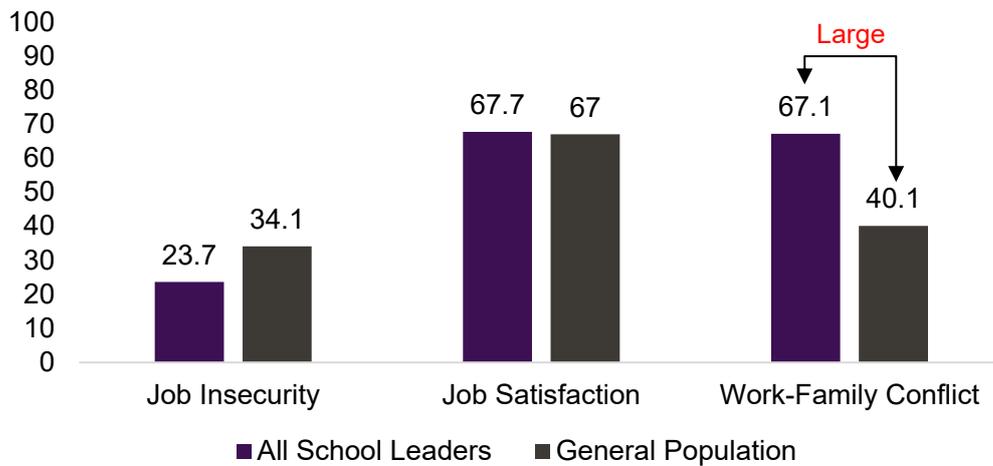


Figure 8.4.1: Work-Individual Interface Mean Scores Comparing All School Leaders to the General Population Using Cohen’s d 2025

COPSOQ-III Mean Scores Over Time Work-Individual Interface All School Leaders

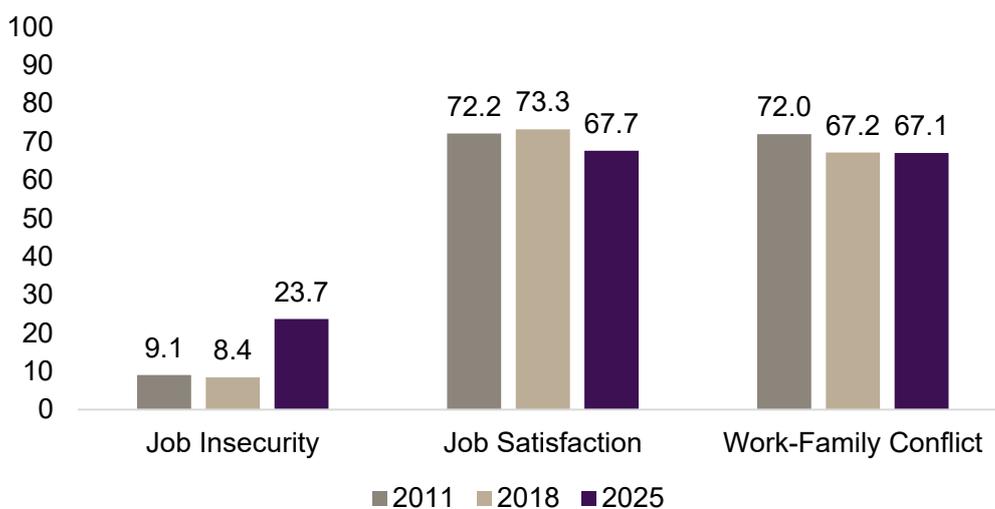


Figure 8.4.2: Work-Individual Interface Mean Scores All School Leaders Over Time

8.5 Health & Wellbeing

The Health & Wellbeing domain looks at general health and mental wellbeing of participants, covering their sense of stress and depression. Unlike the other domains of the COPSOQ-II, these scales are not work dependent and are asked of all participants whether they are retired or an active school leader. For this domain, General Health Perception and Self-Efficacy have a higher score indicating more favourable results in that area. For all other scales within this domain, a higher score indicates less favourable results for that area.

For 2025, Australian school leaders generally score less favourably compared to the general population (Figure 8.5.1). This is particularly true for Burnout, but General Health Perception and Sleeping Troubles also show less favourable results for Australian school leaders. Other scales such as Depressive Symptoms have Australian school leaders and the general population scoring similarly, while Self-Efficacy has Australian school leaders scoring more favourably.

When looking at results over time, Australian school leaders show less favourable results in 2025 compared to both 2011 and 2018 for all scales except Self-Efficacy. Again, Burnout and General Health Perception show much less favourable results in 2025.

2025 COPSOQ-III Health & Wellbeing Mean Scores

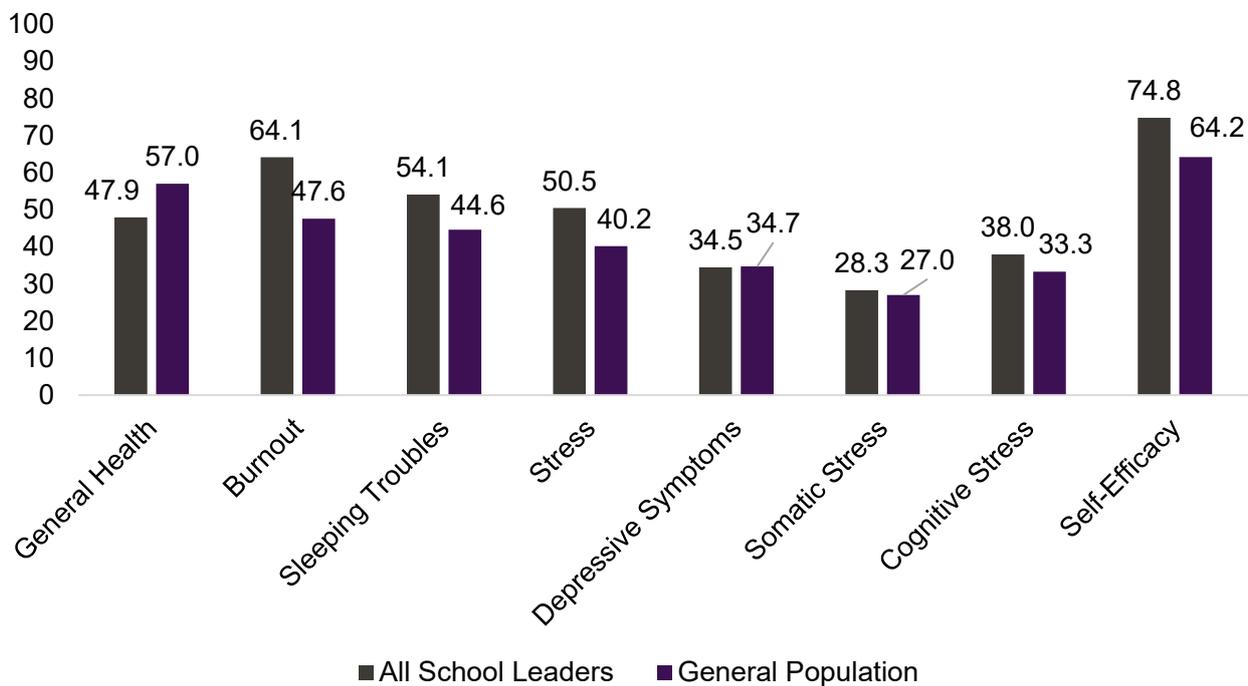


Figure 8.5.1: Health & Wellbeing Mean Scores Comparing All School Leaders to the General Population Using Cohen's d 2025

COPSOQ-III Mean Scores Over Time Health & Wellbeing All School Leaders

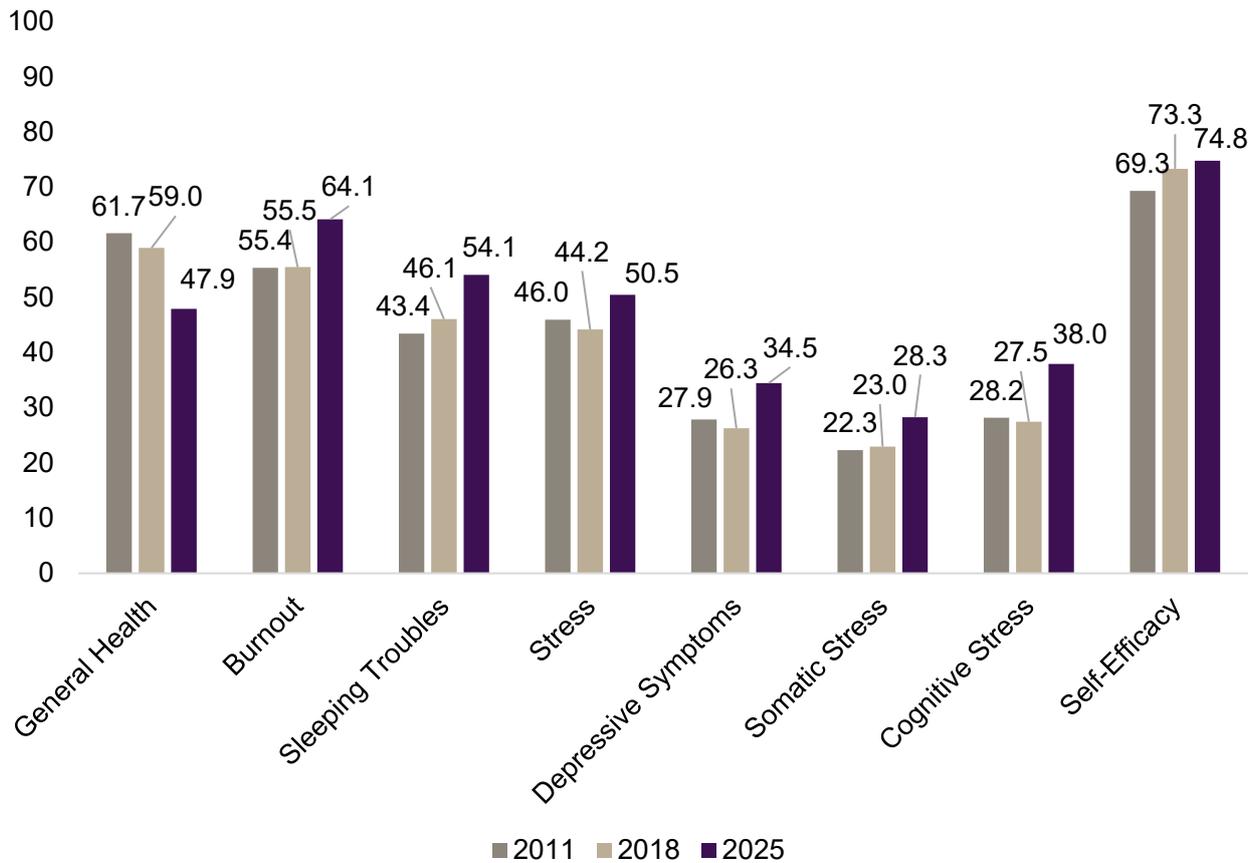


Figure 8.5.2: Health & Wellbeing Mean Scores All School Leaders Over Time



I am concerned about the long-term impact of the current environment of Public Education on my long term mental and overall health and wellbeing. The Department is not making any meaningful inroads into protecting the wellbeing of staff and the increasing workload due to less staff, this will lead to increasing bouts of burnout and quiet quitting. How can we maintain quality teaching and learning when we have to continually pick up the short fall of poor parenting, lack of medical and police supports in rural and regional areas.

Male, Government Secondary NSW

9. RED FLAG EMAILS: TRIGGERS AND COMPARISONS

School leaders who have elevated risks on one or more risk measures—Composite Psychosocial Risk Score (CPRS), Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL), and self-harm—receive Red Flag emails. The email is sent to alert the participant that their results are concerning and to potentially seek assistance (see Appendix B: Red Flag Email Triggers for further details and see Stauder et al. (2017)^[28] for details on the CPRS trigger). This email notifies the participant which risk measure they have triggered, has a suggestion to consider seeking assistance, and a link to available services.

In 2025, a total of 39.1% of school leaders triggered a Red Flag email. This represents a decrease of 5.9% points compared to 2024. Across school sectors, 46.2% of government school leaders triggered a Red Flag email, compared to 31.4% of Catholic school leaders and 22.8% of independent school leaders. Table 9.1 details the percentage of school leaders that triggered a Red Flag email broken down by gender and school type, while Table 9.2 shows the breakdown of Red Flag emails in 2025 by state/territory.

Table 9.1: Breakdown of Red Flag Emails by Gender and School Type 2025

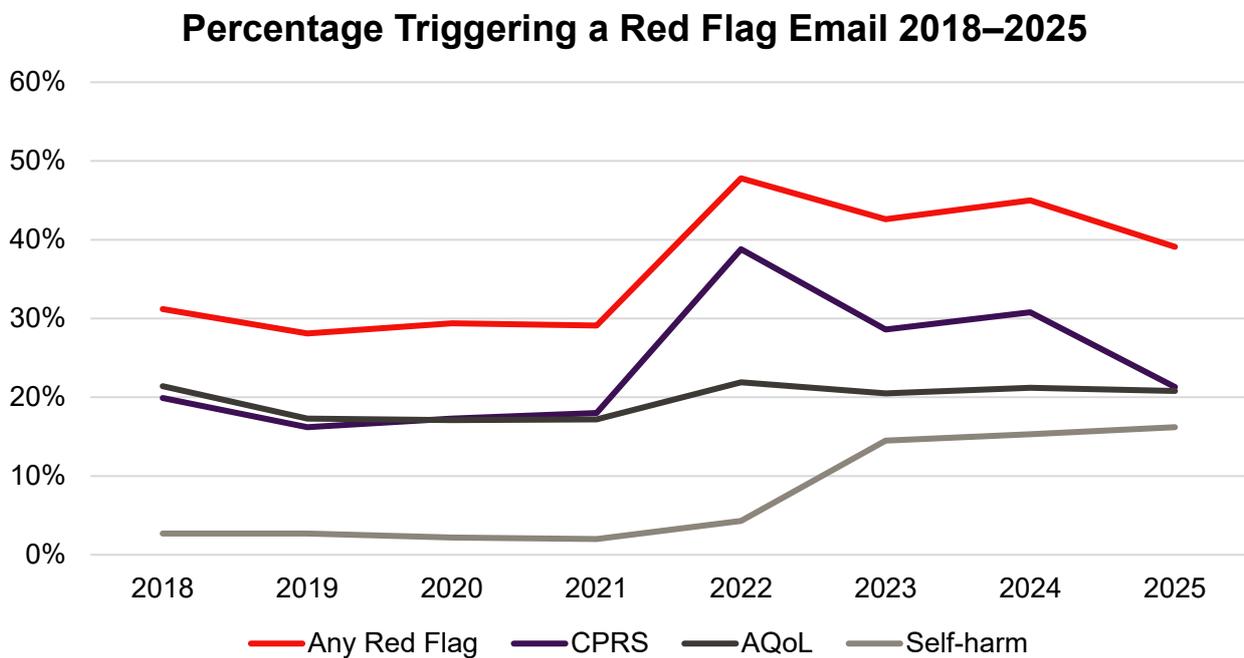
Group	Any Red Flag	CPRS	AQoL	Self-harm
All Participants	39.1%	21.3%	20.8%	16.2%
Female	41.0%	25.2%	19.6%	15.1%
Male	40.8%	22.2%	22.9%	18.1%
Combined	37.4%	17.5%	19.9%	17.1%
Primary	41.8%	24.7%	20.8%	16.8%
Secondary	39.0%	24.4%	19.8%	14.1%
Special	48.5%	33.3%	26.3%	19.2%

In keeping with our report focus, Figure 9.1 shows the percentage of all school leaders that triggered Red Flag emails since 2018 when results for all three categories of Red Flag email and total Red Flag email percentage were first reported. Overall, the percentage of school leaders that triggered a Red Flag email has risen since 2018, although results in 2025 for CPRS have shown a decrease towards levels closer to those experienced in 2021. The trigger for a Self-harm Red Flag email was altered to be more inclusive in 2023, which explains the increase in those Red Flag emails from that point. The results in Table 9.1 and Figure 9.1 highlight the usefulness of the Red Flag emails not only as an individual measure of risk, but as a sector-wide indicator of areas of concern. The trend in CPRS and the overall percentage triggering that flag further reinforce the evidence of substantial pressures that school leaders are under.

Table 9.2: Breakdown of Red Flag Emails by State/Territory 2025

State/Territory	Any Red Flag	CPRS	AQoL	Self-harm
ACT	46.2%	41.0%	10.3%	17.9%
NSW	38.8%	20.4%	20.9%	16.5%
NT	45.2%	29.0%	25.8%	29.0%
QLD	46.8%	29.7%	24.9%	16.2%
SA	38.8%	19.4%	17.5%	15.5%
TAS	43.9%	28.1%	26.3%	19.3%
VIC	34.7%	16.2%	18.5%	15.3%
WA	41.9%	28.1%	19.8%	14.7%

Figure 9.1: Percentage Triggering Red Flag Emails All School Leaders Over Time



10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This 2025 Annual Report marks a significant milestone for the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey, bringing together 15 years of longitudinal evidence on the lived experience of school leadership in Australia. Across this period, the data show a profound reshaping of the principal role. While school leaders remain deeply committed to teaching and learning and derive strong meaning from their work, sustained excessive workload, escalating psychosocial demands, exposure to offensive behaviours, and constrained autonomy have fundamentally altered how the role is experienced. The 2025 findings indicate modest stabilisation in some indicators; however, the overall pattern remains one of sustained pressure and elevated risk, pointing to a growing misalignment between role expectations and the supports required to sustain the work over time.

Meaningful improvement in principal wellbeing cannot be achieved through individual resilience or isolated initiatives alone. It requires coordinated, system-level action to address workload, strengthen psychosocial safety, reduce exposure to violence and aggression, and restore genuine professional autonomy. This report provides a robust foundation for such action. The challenge now is to translate this evidence into sustained reform that ensures school leadership remains a viable, safe, and fulfilling role—one in which school leaders are enabled to thrive, not simply expected to endure.

Reflection from the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council (NSWSPC)

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council has supported the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey because we recognised the urgent need to move beyond anecdote and truly understand the working lives of principals. As a professional association, our responsibility has always been to watch carefully what is happening for principals, particularly as the expectations placed on schools continue to expand in response to broader societal change. What was once spoken about informally or intuitively needed to be evidenced through robust, longitudinal data. Over the past 15 years, the survey has provided deep, rich and scientifically grounded insights into the realities of principalship across Australia. It captures not only the joy, purpose and privilege of leading schools, but also the pressures, complexity and, at times, the darker moments of the role. This evidence has allowed us to substantiate the lived experience of principals with credibility and authority, strengthening our advocacy at both state and national levels. Importantly, the survey has evolved alongside societal change, reflecting how external events inevitably land in schools and reshape the nature of leadership.

As I enter my 16th year as a secondary principal, I recognise how the role has transformed significantly. Today's principals must be visionary yet pragmatic, agile yet steady, deeply compassionate while navigating ongoing uncertainty. Looking ahead, while learning will become increasingly personalised, the social, relational and human dimensions of schooling remain irreplaceable. The survey data and insights strengthens our collective voice and reinforces our commitment to encouraging future leaders to step forward—because strong, supported school leadership remains vital to our schools and our nation.

Denise Lofts, President of NSWSPC

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A: COPSOQ-III Scales and Definition

Demands at Work:

- Quantitative Demands assesses how much one must achieve in one's work. They can be assessed as an incongruity between the number of tasks and the time available to perform the tasks in a satisfactory manner.
- Work Pace assesses the speed at which tasks must be performed. It is a measure of the intensity of work.
- Cognitive Demands assesses demands involving the cognitive abilities of the worker. This is the only subscale of Demands at Work where higher scores are better.
- Emotional Demands assesses when the employee must deal with or is confronted with other people's feelings at work or placed in emotionally demanding situations. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., colleagues, superiors, or subordinates).
- Demands for Hiding Emotions assesses when an employee must conceal her or his own feelings at work from other people. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., colleagues, superiors, or subordinates). The scale shows the amount of time individuals spend in surface acting (pretending an emotion that is not felt) or down-regulating (hiding) felt emotions.

Work Organisation & Job Contents:

- Influence at Work assesses the degree to which the employee can influence aspects of work itself, ranging from planning of work, to the order of tasks.
- Possibilities for Development assesses if the tasks are challenging for the employee and if the tasks provide opportunities for learning, and thus opportunities for development, not only in the job but also on a personal level. Lack of development can create apathy, helplessness, and passivity.
- Meaning of Work assesses both the meaning of the aim of work tasks and the meaning of the context of work tasks. The aim is "vertical": that the work is related to a more general purpose, such as providing students with a good education. Context is "horizontal": that one can see how one's own work contributes to the overall product of the organisation.
- Commitment to the Workplace assesses the degree to which one experiences being committed to one's workplace. It is not the work by itself or the work group that is the focus here, but the organisation in which one is employed.

Interpersonal Relations & Leadership:

- Predictability assesses the means to avoid uncertainty and insecurity. This is achieved if employees receive the relevant information at the right time.
- Recognition (Reward) assesses the recognition by the management of your effort at work.
- Role Clarity assesses the employee's understanding of her or his role at work (e.g., content of tasks, expectations to be met and her or his responsibilities).
- Role Conflicts assesses conflicts which stem from two sources. The first source is about possible inherent conflicting demands within a specific task. The second source is about conflicts when prioritising different tasks.

- Quality of Leadership assesses the next higher manager's leadership in different contexts and domains.
- Social Support from Colleagues assesses school leaders' impressions of the possibility to obtain support from colleagues if one should need it.
- Social Support from Supervisors deals with the employees' impression of the possibility to obtain support from the immediate superior if one should need it.
- Social Community at Work assesses whether there is a feeling of being part of the group of employees at the workplace (e.g., if employee's relations are good and if they work well together).

Work-Individual Interface:

- Job Insecurity deals with school leaders' worries with job security, whereby the lower the result the higher the job security.
- Job Satisfaction deals with school leaders' experience of satisfaction with various aspects of work.
- Work-Family Conflict deals with the possible consequences of work on family/personal life. The focus is on two areas, namely conflict regarding energy (mental and physical) and conflict regarding time.

Health & Wellbeing:

- General Health Perception is the person's assessment of her or his own general health. It is one global item, which has been used in numerous questionnaires, and has been shown to predict many different endpoints including mortality, cardiovascular diseases, hospitalisations, use of medicine, absence from work, and early retirement.
- Burnout assesses the degree of physical and mental fatigue/exhaustion of the employee.
- Stress assesses a reaction of the individual, or the combination of tension or strain, resulting from exposure to adverse or demanding circumstances. As elevated stress levels over a longer period are detrimental to health, it is necessary to determine long-term, or chronic stress.
- Sleeping Troubles assesses sleep length, determined by factors such as over or under sleeping, waking up, interruptions, and of quality of sleep.
- Somatic Stress is assessed as a physical health indicator of a sustained stress reaction of the individual.
- Cognitive Stress assesses cognitive indicators of a sustained stress reaction of the individual.
- Depressive Symptoms assesses a range of factors which together indicate depression.
- Self-Efficacy assesses the extent of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Here Self-Efficacy is understood as global Self-Efficacy, not distinguishing between specific domains of life.

Offensive Behaviour:

- Sexual Harassment is exposure to unwanted and undesired sexual attention in the workplace.
- Threats of Violence is the exposure to a threat of violence in the workplace.
- Physical Violence is the exposure to physical violence in the workplace.
- Bullying is the repeated exposure to unpleasant or degrading treatment in the workplace, and the person finds it difficult to defend themselves against it.
- Unpleasant Teasing is the exposure to unpleasant teasing in the workplace.
- Conflicts and Quarrels is being involved in conflicts and quarrels in the workplace.
- Gossip and Slander is the exposure to gossip and slander in the workplace.

- Cyber Bullying is the exposure of work-related harassment on social media, email, or text.

11.2 Appendix B: Red Flag Email Triggers

From the outset of this project, one aim of the survey was to produce an immediate alert to individuals reporting signs of concerning stress levels. We call these Red Flag emails. Following the publication of a new study into occupational risks by Adrienne Stauder and colleagues, a trigger for composite psychosocial risk score (CPRS) was added to the 2018 survey. The Red Flag email used the following trigger algorithms:

1. Self-harm risk – participants who reported they had thoughts of hurting themselves over the course of the previous week or thoughts that they would be better off dead.
2. Assessment of Quality of Life risk (AQoL) – composite AQoL psychosocial quality of risk score fell into the “high” or “very high” risk groups.
3. CPRS – a trigger threshold mechanism that reduces scores for each strain and resource variable to “High-Risk” vs “Not High-Risk”. For variables where lower scores indicate better working conditions (generally, but not always, strain variables) a score of $\geq 75/100$ is the threshold for concern, and coded high-risk. On the other hand, where lower scores indicate worse working conditions (all resource and two strain variables) a score of $\leq 25/100$ is the threshold for concern, and coded high-risk. The aggregate of high-risk scores is obtained for everyone, with benchmarks triggers for “high” or “very high” risk for each individual.
4. Any combination of the three triggers.

11.3 Appendix C: Additional Voices from the School Leaders

The problem for principals is that there is no possibility to transfer skillset to another role that pays the same. I used to really enjoy my job, but now I hate it. There is nothing I enjoy about the job any more. All the negatives outweigh any positives.

Female, Government Primary ACT

As an experienced Principal, I have not felt more disconnected from my colleague Principals as I currently do. The importance of us connecting and supporting each other is paramount and it is only the work of the TPA that is drawing us closer together. Disappointment from a chaotic system.

Male, Government Primary TAS

I have completed this survey since it's inception and have greatly valued it's insights, especially at my last school, where I responded to a lot of trauma and violence. The survey helped me track how I was coping and so was invaluable.

Male, Government Primary QLD

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute. The job of a principal is changing and growing and surveys like this allow for better communication with governments about the stresses and stressors that are increasing in our lives.

Male, Government Combined TAS

Having been in the role 4 years I have seen a significant increase in the workload requirements for Principals. I am constantly being asked to complete audits/compliance documents/risk assessments, justify money spent in the school community, or write reports. Majority of these tasks are not related to learning and teaching, nor have a direct impact on learning outcomes. NCCD declaration is one example where the principal is required to declare information (that has already been double handled). Surely, as professionals, we can trust colleagues to sign off on tasks associated with the role.

Male, Catholic Secondary VIC

Being a principal is very difficult. The red tape work that takes up so much of the time. I feel I am not doing my strategic work etc and just doing lots of paperwork Takes away for what our purpose it... increase in student violence (physical and verbal). Also staff not happy and verbally abusive and not doing their job.

Female, Government Special QLD

11.4 Appendix D: Publication List

The following is a list of peer-reviewed publications that have come out of the survey and this project. In addition to those listed here, the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Survey has been cited in other peer-reviewed research, and the team has authored practitioner and media commentary that draws on the findings and results of the survey. A full list of scholarly and sector outputs is available on request.

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11. Marsh, H. W., Ryan, R. M., Dicke, T., Pekrun, R., Guo, J., Bradshaw, E. L., Reeve, J., Lüdtke, O., Clarke, T. and Waterschoot, J. (2025). Basic Psychological Needs Under Constrained Autonomy: A Substantive–Methodological Reflection and Analysis of School Leaders' Needs from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective. *Educational Psychology Review*, 37(4), 113.

11.5 Appendix E: Cost Calculation Details for Income and Offensive Behaviours

This report includes an analysis aimed at understanding the real cost of offensive behaviours not only emotionally, but economically as well. This was done by estimating how much productivity school leaders are losing, and what that means in dollars. This was done through six main calculation steps.

1. Survey responses on percentage of time spent dealing with offensive behaviours were turned from bands (1-5%) to midpoints of those bands (2.5%). This was done for each possible response from 1-5% to >50%. Those selecting >50% had their response converted to 60%.
2. Likewise, chosen income band was converted to the midpoint of that band. For example, a response of <\$50,000 per annum was converted to \$40,000 per annum, while a response of \$90,000-\$100,000 per annum was converted to \$95,000 per annum.
3. A daily cost was calculated for each school leader by first calculating daily income (annual income divided by 230 working days) then multiplying it by the percentage of time lost to offensive behaviours. This averaged at **\$106.5** per day for school leaders experiencing offensive behaviours. Increasing numbers of offensive behaviours increased the daily cost. For example, those experiencing only one type of offensive behaviour had an average daily cost of **\$74.8**, while those experiencing seven types had an average daily cost of **\$210.9**. The formulas used here were
 - a. Daily Income = Annual Income/230
 - b. Daily Cost = Daily Income X Reported % Time Lost
4. Daily cost for everyone was then multiplied by the 230 working days to get an annual cost for each school leader. For all school leaders experiencing offensive behaviours the average cost was **\$24,495.1** per year, while the average cost for those experiencing seven types of offensive behaviour was **\$50,976.9** per year. The formula here was
 - a. Annual Cost = Daily Cost X 230
5. The proportion of school leaders affected by offensive behaviours was then calculated. This was the number of school leaders in the survey that reported offensive behaviours compared to all current school leaders in the survey. This ended up being **87.2%** of school leaders.
 - a. Exposure Prevalence = Participants Experiencing OBs/Total Participants
6. Finally, the number of schools in Australia according to the ABS (9,653) was multiplied by the exposure prevalence (0.872) and the average annual cost to arrive at an estimated sector-wide cost of **\$206.2** million per year. The formula here was:
 - a. 9,653 X Exposure Prevalence X Average Annual Cost

It is worth noting that this represents a very conservative estimate and approach, as most schools have more than one school leader.

11.6 Appendix F: Additional Testimonials From Partners and Participants

APPA Statement Full Text

APPA has long understood that principal wellbeing is fundamental to leading schools well. Over time, there has been growing recognition across the sector that the health, safety and wellbeing of school leaders directly influences school culture, staff retention and student outcomes. What once sat as anecdotal evidence, often easy for systems to dismiss, has now been rigorously documented through longitudinal data.

Our sustained commitment to the survey reflects its critical role in making the invisible visible. The survey provides robust evidence of the pressures principals face and the cumulative impact of those pressures over time. While it is deeply concerning that the data continues to show high levels of risk, the survey has been essential in shifting the conversation from isolated individual experiences to a systemic issue that demands systemic solutions. Sadly, despite the strength of this evidence, meaningful and sustained improvement from systems remains limited, which only reinforces the importance of continuing this work.

Principal voice is data. This survey captures the lived experience of principals across the country and documents the reality of the role as it is actually being enacted. At times, the findings are confronting and uncomfortable to read, but that discomfort should be met with compassion and responsibility, not discounting or deflection.

The value of the survey lies in its ability to elevate principals' experiences beyond individual stories and present them as a collective, national voice. It challenges narratives that frame wellbeing concerns as issues of personal capacity or resilience and instead positions them as reflections of job design, system expectations and resource constraints. The survey asks the system to listen—and to respond.

School leadership has changed significantly. Emotional labour has increased markedly. Compliance and accountability demands have expanded without corresponding growth in administrative support. At the same time, principals are leading communities experiencing rising levels of mental health complexity among students, families and staff, while access to specialist support has not kept pace.

Principals are undertaking substantial care leadership on behalf of their communities, often absorbing risk and responsibility that rightly belongs to systems. The survey has played a crucial role in documenting this shift and making visible the cumulative toll it takes. The individual reports provided to principals are particularly valuable, with Red Flags acting as tangible prompts to seek support.

However, there is an emerging risk that the increasing prevalence of Red Flags may inadvertently normalise systemic neglect, creating a sense that high risk is simply “part of the job.” The survey therefore also serves as a call to action: to challenge systems to provide the conditions and supports necessary for sustainable leadership, rather than relying on principals to carry the load alone.

Fifteen years of data tell a clear and consistent story about the reality of school leadership and the depth of commitment principals make—not only to teaching and learning, but to the wellbeing and development of their communities. Principals are passionate, capable and deeply compassionate professionals. However, without systemic, long-term change, their capacity to lead well and sustainably is being steadily eroded.

APPA looks forward to a genuine, system-wide commitment to improving leader wellbeing—one that begins by listening to principals and engaging with them to understand the root causes of harm in the role. This must be followed by well-resourced, sustainable strategies, underpinned by bipartisan commitment and long-term policy alignment.

Resilience must not be redefined as tolerating threats, harassment, or job demands that exceed available resources. Wellbeing must be positioned as a system responsibility, not as a test of an individual's toughness or endurance. School leadership can be the best job in the world, but it should never come at the expense of a leader's physical or mental health.

What we want to see, in tangible form, in the next 15 years are clearer protections, stronger system-level responses and shared accountability. Schools are part of a system and so individual principals should not be left to manage serious incidents in isolation or to navigate complex complaints processes without adequate support. We look forward to:

- clear, enforceable standards of conduct for interactions with schools
- consistent system responses to offensive and threatening behaviour
- access to timely legal, psychological and professional support for leaders
- public recognition that respect for school leaders, and indeed all school staff, underpins safe, effective schools

Additional Participant Testimonials

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey has motivated my ongoing participation because it offers a rare, evidence-based view of the realities of school leadership. Each year, the data provides a reflective checkpoint that helps me understand my own wellbeing in relation to national trends and reinforces that many pressures principals face are systemic, not individual. The findings have shaped my leadership by normalising open conversations about wellbeing, strengthening the protective boundaries I put in place around workload, and prompting a more deliberate focus on staff wellbeing as a shared responsibility. As a Board Member of ACPPA, I also use the survey data to highlight the challenges of the principal role at national forums and in advocacy work.

The long-term survey delivers significant value to school leadership by giving principals a unified national voice and transforming lived experience into credible evidence that influences policy, resourcing, and public understanding. It supports professional associations in driving reforms related to workload, psychological safety, and leadership sustainability.

Over time, the survey has documented the growing complexity, emotional labour, and compliance demands placed on principals. It reinforces that the role has become too diverse and expansive for one person to sustain without substantial redesign or improved systemic support.

Looking ahead, I hope to see a reimagined principal role, stronger wellbeing protections, sustainable leadership pathways, greater recognition of principal expertise, and continued longitudinal data to guide meaningful reform over the next 15 years.

Male, Catholic Primary QLD

I have always keenly participated and anticipated survey results. We are rarely asked to reflect on these issues around wellbeing and I think this is an avoidable systematic fault. We need to know the truth particularly around State schools and pressures that come with them. Much joy also, of course. This long-term survey serves as a pressure check around the nation. On many occasions it has made me realise I don't have it as bad as others and many of my coping strategies are strong. I have been a deputy or principal for the last 19 years and it has not got easier. What is expected of us is phenomenal. For many years we have known that maths, science, history and English are vital but the range of other issues most people assume are dealt with in the confines of families, are our daily bread. What would I like to change in the next 15? I never want to seem the cynic but I

have zero faith that the pressures played out in the survey will abate or be mitigated in any way. That said, it a job that makes be proud almost every day and I work with like minded people who believe the haul mark of a free and democratic state is a free and effective government education system. It still exists but it's under heavy fire.

Male, Government Primary QLD

I've continued to participate in the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey because it has always felt like one of the few structured ways for principals to speak honestly about the ever-changing demands and pressures of the work we do.

Our work is deeply rewarding, but it is also demanding, complex and at times emotionally draining. The survey helps me pause each year and take stock of my own wellbeing, and it has reminded me that looking after myself is not a luxury but a responsibility I need to take seriously. The data it provides gives me insight into how my wellbeing is tracking from one year to the next, and how it has changed over time. As senior leaders, we need to be in a good place if we are to support our staff, our students, and the families we serve, and these insights are invaluable.

The long-term value of the survey is significant. It has given principals a national voice and provided credible data that captures what many of us experience daily. I know my employers have taken keen interest in the data when it is published each year.

That evidence has strengthened advocacy efforts and helped shift the conversation from individual resilience to systemic responsibility. Over the years, I've seen leadership become more complex, with increasing administrative, pastoral and compliance demands. The survey has documented that change clearly and has helped validate what principals have been saying for a long time.

Looking ahead, I hope the years ahead bring continued recognition of the importance of principal wellbeing and a stronger commitment to resourcing schools in ways that make the role sustainable.

Male, Catholic Primary NSW

Full Text of Participant Testimonials

Some testimonials have been truncated for their use in the main body of the report. In the interest of transparency, we include the full text of the testimonials that have been modified for space here in the appendix.

Over fifteen years, the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey has transformed principal wellbeing from an individual journey into a documented, system-level concern achieving policy response.

The survey findings have profoundly influenced how I approach my own sustainability and that of my staff. For Principals to obtain national data on workload intensification, role complexity, and mental health challenges validates individual experiences while demonstrating these are structural issues, not personal failings. This evidence has empowered Principals, systems and associations to advocate more confidently for reasonable boundaries, additional support structures, and both understanding and realistic expectations within school communities and with policymakers and system authorities. The survey's greatest value lies in providing principals a collective voice. Individual principals may struggle to be heard, but aggregated national data commands attention from policymakers, education departments, and the broader public. The longitudinal nature captures evolving challenges—from accountability pressures to pandemic recovery to technological disruption—creating an invaluable historical record of Australian school leadership.

School leadership has intensified dramatically over the course of my career. Principals now navigate exponentially greater complexity: a more fragmented and at times volatile society, heightened compliance demands, Child Safe responsibilities, community expectations, mental health crises, and rapid technological change. The survey has documented this trajectory while advocating for systemic solutions rather than expecting individual resilience alone to suffice.

Looking ahead, I hope the next fifteen years see continued translation of survey findings into tangible policy reform: broader community appreciation of education as a profession, sustainable workload models, improved support infrastructure, and recognition that principal wellbeing directly impacts positive outcomes in learning communities. Ultimately, thriving principals create thriving school communities—a precept this initiative continues to illuminate.

Male, Independent Primary SA

Participating in this long-term survey has always felt both a privilege and a responsibility. In the early years, I felt honoured to contribute to a clearer, more honest picture of school leadership in Australia. Before stepping into principalship, I completed my Master of Educational Leadership at ACU which gave me trust in the university's work and strengthened my commitment to participating in the research. I love being a teacher and I have poured my whole heart into this career, striving to make a meaningful difference for the children in my care and the staff I lead. Like many school leaders, I present a steady public face to support my community, knowing that maintaining their confidence is an essential part of the role.

This survey has allowed our “inside voices” to be heard, those reflections on wellbeing, workload and the emotional demands of leadership that we often keep to ourselves. It has captured the realities of the role in a way no individual could, giving Principals a national voice and elevating our experiences into meaningful conversations within our educational systems. Hearing the findings referenced in mainstream media and watching staff

wellbeing gradually become part of our conversations, when it was once a topic we tended to keep to ourselves, has been genuinely encouraging.

Over time, the survey has also become a personal checkpoint. The questions prompt me to pause, reflect and sometimes seek coaching or deeper professional conversations. Most importantly, the results have shown me that I am not alone, strengthening my connection to colleagues across the country and reinforcing the value of contributing each year.

Female, Catholic Secondary NSW

I have continued to participate in the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey because it consistently reflects the lived reality of school leadership. Over time, the survey has helped me pause and take stock of my own wellbeing. The findings have reinforced the importance of sustainable leadership practices, realistic workloads, and creating conditions where staff feel safe, supported, and able to do their best work. Participation in the survey has influenced how I approach workload management, conversations about wellbeing, and the systems we put in place to support staff through increasingly complex demands.

The value of this long-term survey lies in its ability to give principals a credible national voice. School leaders often operate under intense pressure, and without data, those pressures can be misunderstood or minimised. The survey provides evidence that supports advocacy, informs policy discussions, and ensures that wellbeing is recognised as central to effective school leadership and student outcomes.

Looking back, the role of the principal has changed significantly. Leadership has become more complex, more accountable, and more emotionally demanding. The survey has played an important role in documenting this shift over time, capturing both the challenges and the resilience of principals. It has helped ensure that these changes are visible, measured, and taken seriously across the education system.

Male, Government Primary ACT

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