



CHAPTER 3:

Workload issues for BC teachers

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This report is one of a series documenting the findings of the *Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009* survey.
For additional information, see www.bctf.ca/TeacherWorklife.aspx.



WORKLIFE OF
BC TEACHERS
2009

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Introduction

Increased teacher workload is a significant issue in British Columbia's public schools in the face of an ongoing funding crisis in public education. Districts have reduced teaching positions as one response to growing budget shortfalls. This means fewer specialist teachers, an increase in the student/teacher ratio, and more classes that exceed class composition limits. In recent years, the number of classes exceeding the legislated limits for class composition has increased steadily¹, while the number of specialist teachers available to support these students has declined². The erosion of support staff positions and new mandates introduced by the Ministry of Education without adequate resources to implement them are also factors that have an impact on the workload of BC teachers.

One of the objectives of the [*Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey*](#) was to examine various aspects of teacher workload. The survey asked teachers how many hours they work on average, per week, and to indicate the hours worked during recess and lunch breaks, before and after school and evenings, and on weekends. This report describes the average hours worked per week in total, examining how hours worked vary by demographic characteristics.

The survey also gathered information about the amount of time teachers spend on various teaching-related activities outside of the regular workday. This report includes a detailed analysis of the activities that take up the most time, and the amount of time teachers spend on each of these activities. A section on preparing report cards and the BC enterprise Student Information System (BCeSIS) is also included.

Teachers in the survey were also asked to comment on issues of significance to them relating to teacher workload. Their qualitative responses to this question are integrated into the relevant sections of the report.

The report is organized in four sections: addressing total hours worked per week on teaching activities, hours worked during breaks and outside of the regular school day, additional time spent on school-related tasks outside of the regular workday, and preparing report cards and BCeSIS.

¹ Since 2006–07, the number of classes with four or more students with an Individual Education Plan increased from 9,559 to 11,959 classes.

² Special Education teaching positions decreased from 4,051.47 FTE teachers in 2001–02 to 3,446.5 in 2007–08. Based on budget estimates, the number of FTE Special Education teachers has further decreased by 64.19 FTE positions since 2007–08, for a total loss of 669.16 FTE positions between 2001–02 and 2009–10.

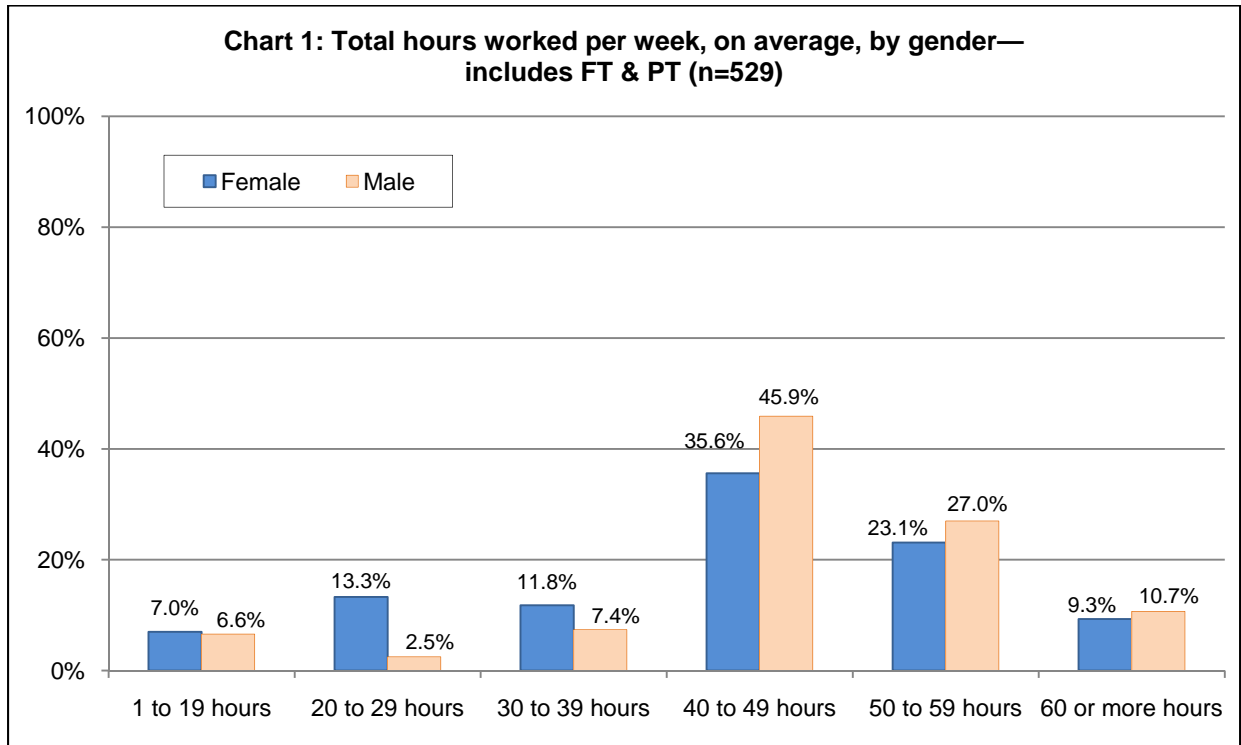
Total hours worked per week on teaching activities

The survey asked teachers to estimate the total number of hours they work in an average week on school-related work, including work outside of regular school hours. Of the 529 teachers who responded, 72% work 40 or more hours per week on school-related work. One-quarter of teachers work 50 to 59 hours per week, and about 1 in 10 works 60 or more hours per week (Table 1).

Table 1: Total hours worked per week, on average (all cases)

	Number of teachers	Percentage of total
1 to 19 hours	36	6.8%
20 to 29 hours	56	10.6%
30 to 39 hours	57	10.8%
40 to 49 hours	202	38.2%
50 to 59 hours	128	24.2%
60 or more hours	50	9.5%
Total	529	100.0%

Female teachers are over-represented in the 20-to-29- and the 30-to-39-hours-per-week groups, presumably because a higher proportion of female teachers works part-time³ (Chart 1). Male teachers are over-represented in the 40-to-49-hours-per-week group. Only slight gender differences are found between teachers working 50 to 59 and 60 or more hours per week.



³ See [Chapter 1, Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey](#).

Average total weekly hours worked: Full-time teaching contracts

This section examines the average number of hours that full-time teachers work per week by gender, age, teaching experience, and grades taught. This analysis is based on the responses of 326 full-time teachers who work an average of 30 or more hours per week and who were not on leave at the time of the survey. Full-time teachers surveyed work an average of 47.8 hours per week, ranging from 30 to 84 hours.

Table 2 shows the average hours worked per week for each demographic group. There is no notable gender difference in hours worked per week for full-time teachers. Older teachers work fewer hours on average than younger teachers. Teachers 55 years and older work an average of 46.4 hours per week, 1.7 hours less than teachers under 45 years (48.1 hours) and 2.4 hours less than teachers 45 to 54 years old (48.8 hours).

The total hours teachers work in an average week appears to decrease as years of teaching experience increase. Teachers with 20 or more years of teaching experience work an average of 46.7 hours per week compared to 49.9 hours per week for teachers with less than 10 years experience.

Secondary teachers work an average of 49.3 hours per week, 2.3 more hours per week than elementary teachers (47.0 hours).

Table 2: Average total hours worked on school-related work per week

Characteristic	Average hours worked per week
Gender (n=324)	
Male	47.4
Female	48.0
Age (n=325)	
Under 45 years	48.1
45 to 54 years	48.8
55 or older	46.4
Teaching experience (n=323)	
Less than 10 years	49.9
10 to 19 years	48.2
20 or more years	46.7
Grades taught* (n=294)	
Elementary	47.0
Secondary	49.3
Overall sample	47.8 hours

* Those teaching in Adult Education and combined Grades K to 7 & 8 to 12 excluded, as there are too few cases for valid comparisons.

Part-time teachers

About one in six teachers surveyed works on a part-time continuing or term contract. The average full-time equivalent (FTE) assignment for teachers with a part-time contract is 0.64 FTE, or just over three days per week. Part-time teachers surveyed work an average of 31.4 hours per week, ranging from 5 to 60 total hours per week.

About one-third of part-time teachers indicated how many unpaid hours they work per week in addition to their FTE assignment. On average, these part-time teachers work 7.3 unpaid hours.

Characteristics of teachers working more than 60 hours per week

Almost 1 in 10 respondents reports working an average of 60 or more hours per week on school-related work. Table 3 shows the percentage breakdown of teachers working less than 60 hours per week and more than 60 hours per week by gender, age, teaching experience, grades taught, and number of split grades taught.

As can be seen in the table below, the most significant differences between the percentage of teachers who work more than 60 hours per week and those who work less than 60 hours per week are due to age, teaching experience, and the type and number of grades taught.

While the same proportion of secondary and elementary teachers works over 60 hours per week, a much lower proportion of secondary teachers works less than 60 hours per week than elementary teachers. Teachers who teach more than one split grade class are more likely to work over 60 hours per week. Younger teachers are more likely to work over 60 hours per week while teachers 55 and older are less likely to do so. The results are similar for the least- and most-experienced teachers.

Table 3: Characteristics of teachers who work more than 60 hours per week

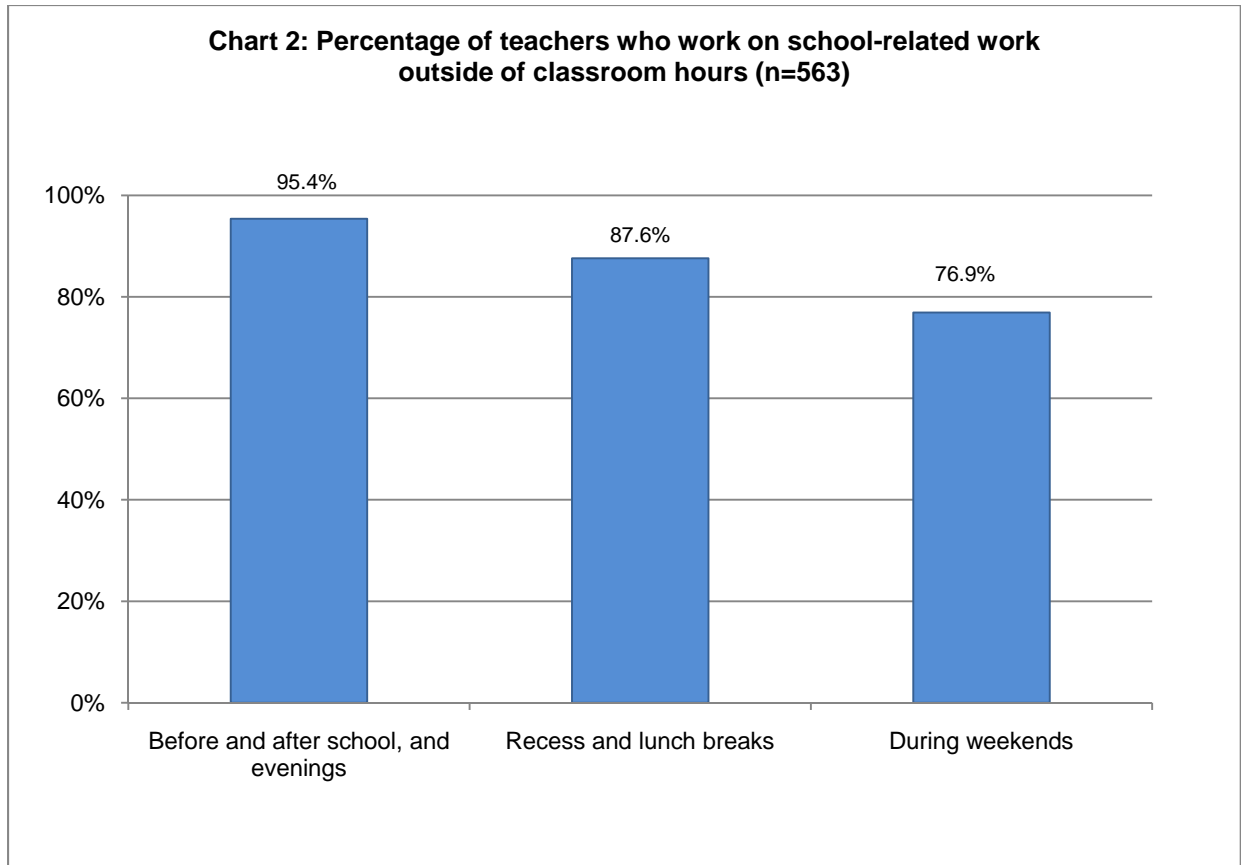
Overall sample	% of teachers who work <i>more than 60 hours/week</i>	% of teachers who work <i>less than 60 hours/week</i>
Gender		
Male	74.0%	76.9%
Female	26.0%	23.1%
Age		
Under 35 years	20.0%	14.0%
35 to 45 years	28.0%	29.9%
45 to 54 years	34.0%	30.4%
55 or older	18.0%	25.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Teaching experience		
Less than 10 years	30.0%	22.6%
10 to 19 years	42.0%	35.5%
20 or more years	28.0%	41.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Grades taught*		
Elementary	44.7%	63.2%
Secondary	44.7%	28.9%
Both grades K-7 & 8-12	10.6%	7.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Number of split grades taught		
None	44.9%	54.2%
One	22.4%	24.3%
More than one	32.7%	21.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0% (error due to rounding)

* Adult Education excluded as there are too few cases for valid comparisons.

Hours worked during breaks and outside of the regular school day

The survey asked teachers whether they work during recess and lunch breaks, before and after school and evenings, and during weekends. They were also asked to indicate “how many hours per week, on average, you spend working during the following time periods, to the nearest hour?”

Of the 563 teachers in the survey, 95.4% work before and after school and/or evenings, 87.6% work during recess and lunch breaks, and 76.9% work during the weekends (Chart 2).



Recess and lunch breaks

Of the 498 teachers who spent time working during recess and lunch, 486 indicated how many hours they spent per week on school-related work. The majority of these teachers (70.8%) works up to three hours in an average week during recess and lunch (Chart 3).

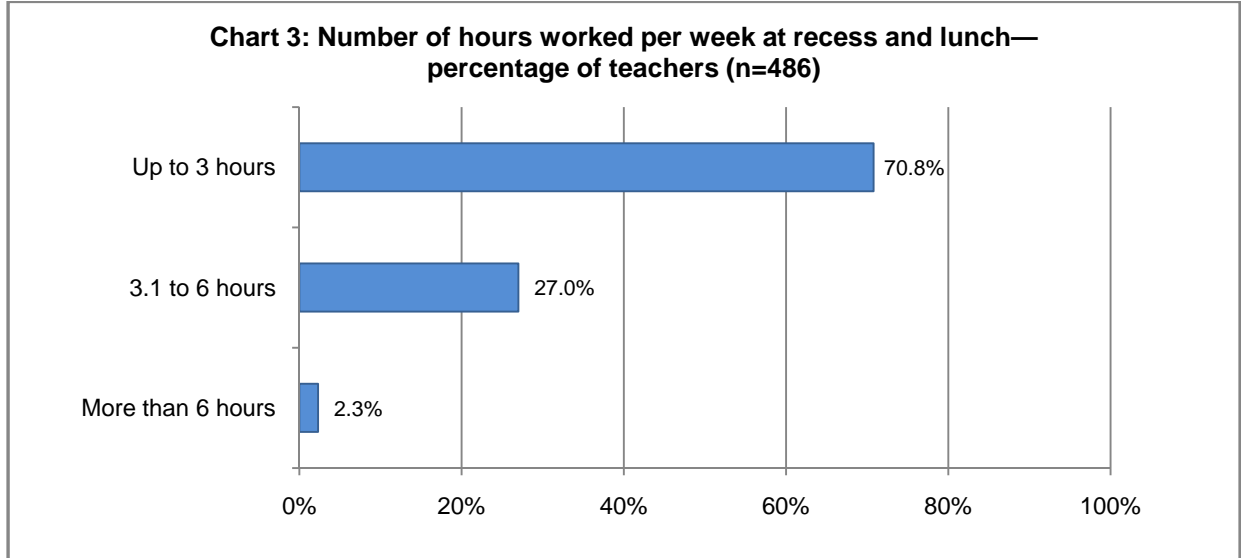


Table 4 shows that, on average, the teachers surveyed work 2.7 hours per week at recess and lunch. Secondary teachers (3.1 hours) work higher-than-average hours per week at recess and lunch. There are only minor variations in average amount of time teachers spend working at recess and lunch by gender, age, and years of experience.

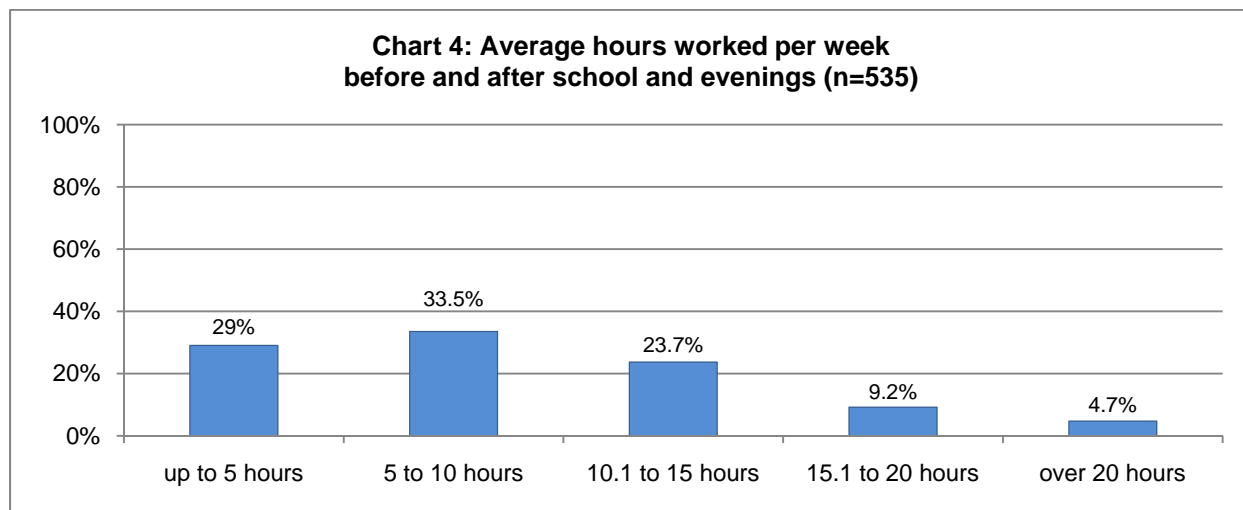
Table 4: Average hours worked per week during recess and lunch

Characteristic	Average hours worked per week
Gender (n=477)	
Male	2.8
Female	2.6
Age (n=479)	
Under 45 years	2.6
45 to 54 years	2.7
55 or older	2.7
Teaching experience (n=477)	
Less than 10 years	2.6
10 to 19 years	2.6
20 or more years	2.8
Grades taught* (n=426)	
Elementary	2.4
Secondary	3.1
Overall sample (n=498)	2.7 hours

* Those teaching in Adult Education and combined Grades K to 7 & 8 to 12 excluded, as there are too few cases for valid comparisons.

Before and after school and evenings

Teachers spend a considerable amount of time outside of classroom hours on school-related activities. Almost all teachers surveyed (95.4%, see Chart 2) work before and after school and evenings on school-related activities. Of these teachers, 29% work up to five hours per week (on average) during these times. One-third of teachers work 5 to 10 hours per week and one in seven teachers works more than 15 hours per week (on average) before and after school and during evenings (Chart 4).



Teachers in the survey indicated working an average of 9.8 hours per week before and after school and evenings. Table 5 shows that the average number of hours teachers work per week, before and after school and evenings, varies with age and experience. Older, more-experienced teachers work more hours before and after school and evenings, compared to the overall sample. Teachers 55 years and older work an average of 10.6 hours, and teachers with over 20 years' experience work 10.3 hours, on average, before and after school and evenings. Elementary and secondary teachers work the same number of hours per week before and after school, and evenings.

Table 5: Average hours worked per week before and after school and evenings

Characteristic	Average hours worked per week
Gender (n=526)	
Male	9.7
Female	9.9
Age (n=528)	
Under 45 years	9.3
45 to 54 years	10.0
55 or older	10.6
Teaching experience (n=526)	
Less than 10 years	9.3
10 to 19 years	9.7
20 or more years	10.3
Grades taught* (n=472)	
Elementary	10.1
Secondary	10.1
Overall sample (n=535)	9.8 hours

* Those teaching in Adult Education and combined Grades K to 7 & 8 to 12 excluded, as there are too few cases for valid comparisons.

During weekends

Three-quarters (76.9%) of teachers in the survey spend time on school-related work during weekends. Most of these teachers (85.1%) spend up to five hours of their weekend doing so (Chart 5).

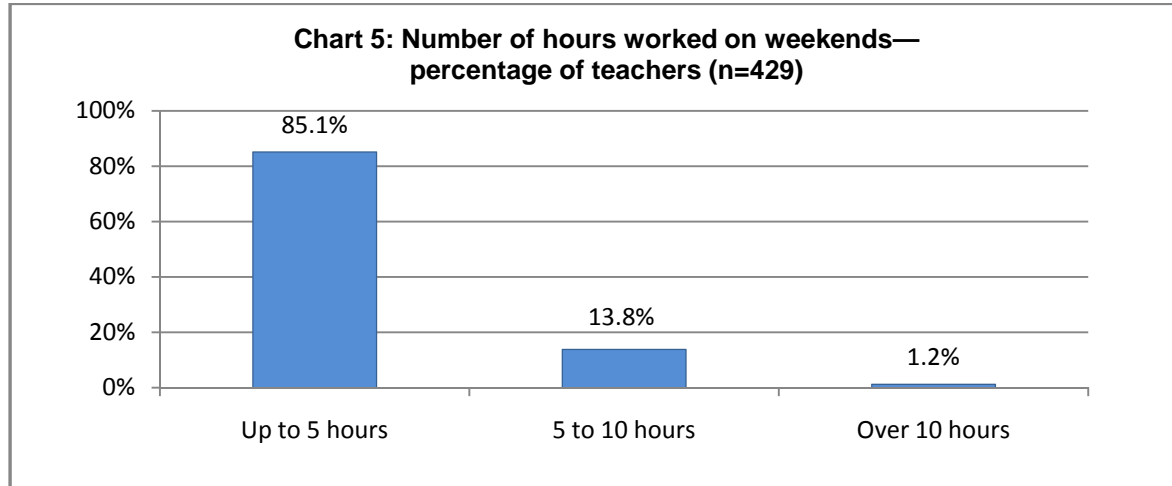


Table 6 shows that teachers in the survey work an average of 3.7 hours on weekends, with male teachers working more hours (4.0 hours) at this time than female teachers (3.6 hours). Secondary teachers spend more time working on weekends (4.4 hours) compared to teachers in elementary grades (3.3 hours).

Teachers with less than ten years' experience spend the most time (4.2 hours) on school-related work during the weekends. The average number of hours teachers spend on school-related work on weekends decreases gradually as years of teaching experience increase.

Table 6: Average hours worked per week during weekends

Characteristic	Average hours worked per week
Gender (n=423)	
Male	4.0
Female	3.6
Age (n=424)	
Under 45 years	3.8
45 to 54 years	3.9
55 or older	3.3
Teaching experience (n=423)	
Less than 10 years	4.2
10 to 19 years	3.7
20 or more years	3.5
Grades taught* (n=380)	
Elementary	3.3
Secondary	4.4
Overall sample	3.7 hours

* Those teaching in Adult Education and combined Grades K to 7 & 8 to 12 excluded, as there are too few cases for valid comparisons.

What teachers say...

Respondents' comments illustrate the varied tasks teachers work on during recess and lunch. These include attending meetings, dealing with students, checking with education assistants (EAs), doing prep work, and making phone calls. One teacher ran the school's hot lunch program four times per week.

"All meetings are scheduled at lunch time and after school. Lunch breaks are virtually unheard of."

"Have a resource room with little to no admin support, so when there is a difficulty with a student, I deal with it during recess and lunch."

"Lots of work actually occurs on the run, in the halls, the copy room, on the way to somewhere else, or while doing something else like having lunch and checking with the SEAs on a child."

"I was only on a 0.6 FTE contract, but was working about 50–60 hours a week, mostly on planning and preparation (10–15 hours), marking & record-keeping (10–15 hours), but significant time also went into meetings (IEP and other) and working with students outside of class. I rarely had time to eat lunch or break for recess, and was often at the school from the early morning into the late evening."

There are some limitations to this data. Teacher workload is challenging to measure, as teachers work on a wide range of school-related activities or tasks outside of the regular workday, often on evenings and weekends. The demands vary over the school year, with peak times during report cards, teacher-parent interviews, major school events, and sporting events. E-mail and the growing role of computer databases and internet-based curriculum can also blur the boundaries between the start and end of the workday, as much of this work can be done in any location at any time.

Teachers commented on the variability of their workload and the stress associated with peak periods:

"Certain seasons are busier than others. Some times seem quite manageable, while others are overwhelming."

"The hours are difficult to calculate. I arrive at school and power through most days until 5:00 p.m. with few recess or lunch breaks. Coaching eliminates prep time and we all give up time for recess (or out of school) playground duty. I am drained when I come home to my own two young kids. If I could afford to stay home I would; the job takes its toll on my emotional and physical health."

"As a Distributed Learning (DL) teacher, it's difficult to estimate, as our time is both flexible and consuming. We probably spend more time than we would in a classroom because we are so available to our students and families."

Additional hours per week spent on work-related tasks outside of regular work hours

The survey also asked teachers “how many hours (rounded to the nearest hour) do you spend in addition to your regular workday on any of the following work-related tasks in an average week?”

Chart 6 shows that the work-related tasks the most teachers spend time on in addition to the regular workday are doing preparation (88%), attending meetings (84%), marking (76%), dealing with work-related e-mail (74%), working with students outside the class (70%), and making contact with parents (67%).

Almost half of teachers (44%) are involved in professional learning communities or some other collaboration. About one-quarter of teachers work on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or electronic record-keeping through BCeSIS outside of the regular workday. Teachers are more likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities (45%) than in fund-raising (11%). In terms of union involvement, 4% of respondents are involved in Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs), and 14% are in union roles.

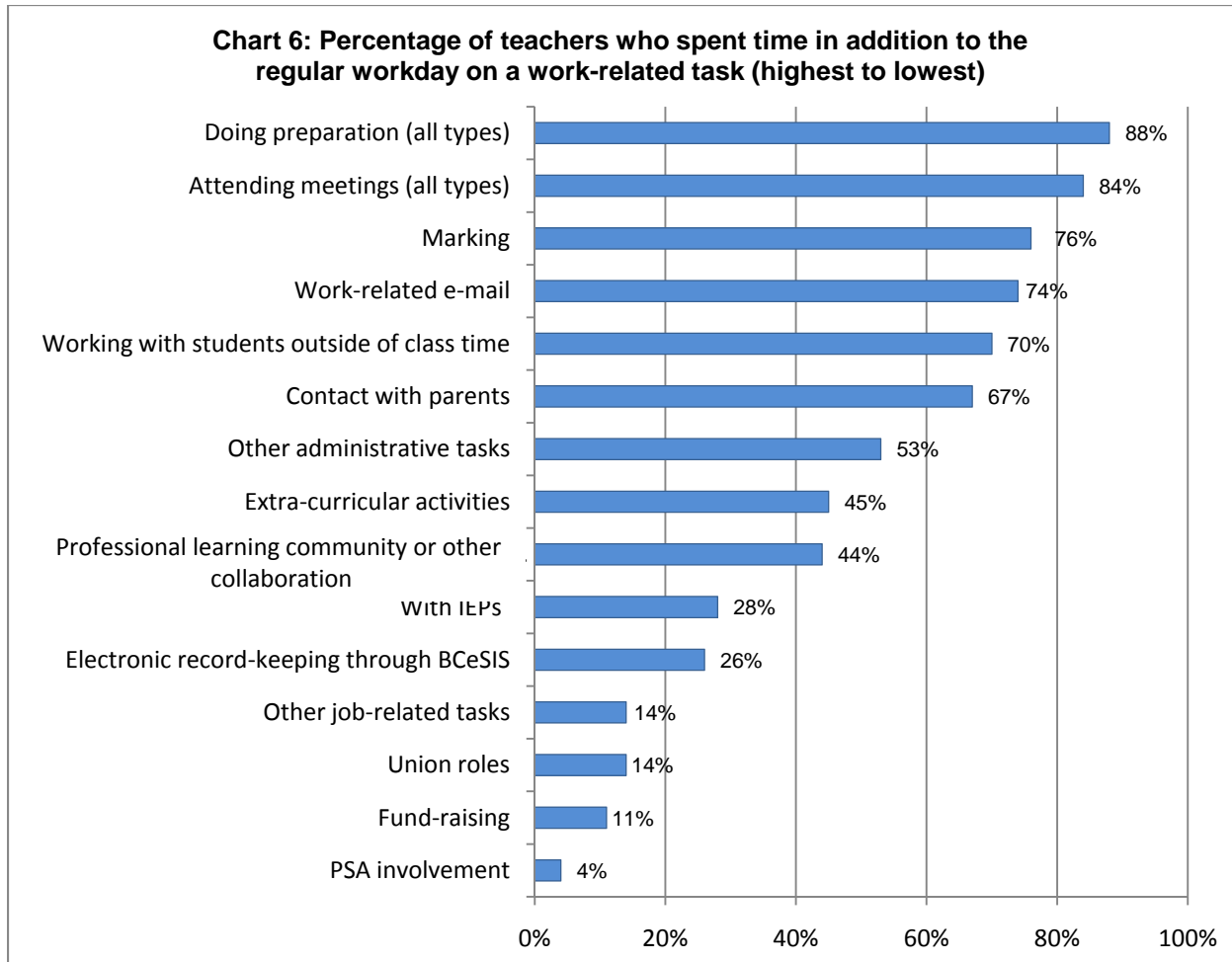


Table 7 shows the average amount of time per week teachers spend outside of the regular workday on work-related tasks. Teachers in the survey spend the most additional hours doing preparation (6.6 hours), marking (4.5 hours), extra-curricular activities (2.7 hours), and working with students outside of class time (2.6 hours). While working on other job-related tasks involved a considerable amount of time (3.3 hours), this affects a small proportion of teachers (14%).

Table 7: Average hours per week in addition to the regular workday for each work-related task

Work-related tasks	% of teachers who spend time on task outside of the regular workday	Average hours per week
Doing preparation (all types)	88%	6.6
Attending meetings (all types)	84%	1.8
Marking	76%	4.5
Work-related e-mail	74%	1.8
Working with students outside of class time	70%	2.6
Contact with parents	67%	1.1
Other administrative tasks	53%	1.8
Extra-curricular activities	45%	2.7
Professional learning community or other collaboration	44%	1.5
IEPs	28%	1.7
Electronic record-keeping through BCeSIS	26%	1.5
Other job-related tasks	14%	3.3
Union roles	14%	2.1
Fund-raising	11%	1.3
PSA involvement	4%	1.5

The above data table describes work that can be considered in terms of four broad categories:

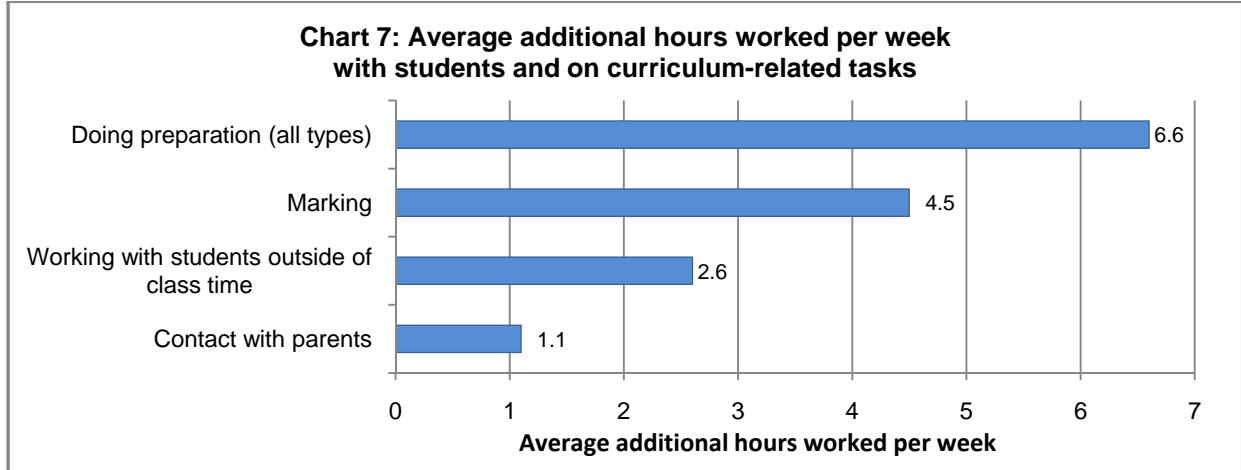
- working with students outside of class time, and on curriculum-related tasks
- administrative tasks
- professional collaboration and extra-curricular activities
- other work-related tasks.

The following sections look at the data according to these four areas. Each section includes charts that show average hours teachers work per week on each task, with some demographic comparisons provided⁴. All sections also include qualitative data illustrating what teachers say about their work within these areas.

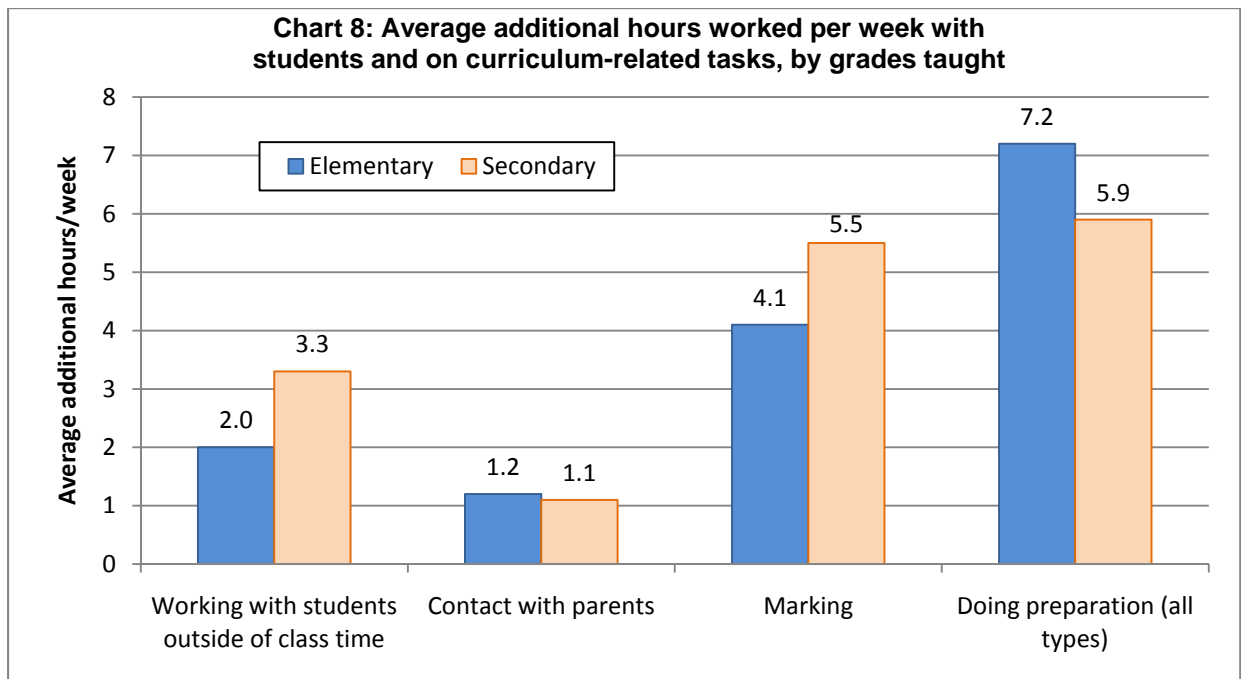
⁴ Grades-taught categories were combined into 2 categories—elementary and secondary. Comparisons are not shown for those teaching Adult Education or combined K–12 grades, as there are too few cases for meaningful comparisons.

Working with students outside of class time, and on curriculum-related tasks

Teachers in the survey spend the most time outside of the regular workday doing preparation (6.6 hours) and marking (4.5 hours). About two-thirds (70%, see Table 7) of teachers spend an average of 2.6 hours per week working with students and 1.1 hours in contact with parents outside of the regular workday (Chart 7).



There are some differences between how much time elementary teachers and secondary teachers spend on curriculum-related tasks (Chart 8). Secondary teachers spend about 1.3 hours more in an average week working with students outside of class time, and about 1.4 more hours on marking, compared to elementary teachers. However, elementary teachers spend an average of 1.3 hours more per week than secondary teachers doing preparation outside of regular work hours.



What teachers say...

Classroom preparation is the work that teachers spend the most time on outside of the regular school day, and it is the issue about which they have the most to say. The comments indicate how much time teachers spend outside of the regular school day preparing assignments and classroom curriculum:

“I spend a lot of time with preparation and marking at school and at home. I find I have very little if any time to do this during the school day as I am always working with students. Very little ends up being accomplished during prep time as I’m usually setting up for the next hands-on activity. It takes a lot of time and planning to provide experiential learning opportunities.”

“Lots of extra time required outside of school hours to prep for lessons and mark student work.”

“You do what is needed. Many hours are put in during personal time, depending upon the prep needed.”

Some comments indicate that the increased number of special needs students assigned to a classroom is increasing the prep time needed to support these students:

“A split grade with four designated students plus four more receiving Learning Assistance (LA) (and one English as a Second Language [ESL]) requires a lot of thinking, planning, prep to meet individual needs.”

“Classroom preparation and marking takes so much more time now as the number of children with special needs and learning disabilities has sharply increased.”

Teachers report that subject specialties such as visual arts, woodworking, laboratory sciences, and cooking require a lot of preparation time, including ordering, shopping for, and maintaining an inventory of all of the supplies required to offer the course:

“Specialty areas that are hands on such as Visual Arts, Cooking and Woodworking take a significant amount of time to prep for, plus extra time to always source the cheapest material cost or beg for supplies from companies takes a lot of time. Also we are in charge of BA operations to balance our accounts and pay our suppliers.”

The following comment illustrates the challenges Home Economics teachers face in preparing all of the materials necessary to offer a class and how living in a rural community increases the workload associated with these tasks:

“Prep time: As a Home Ec teacher, an extra-ordinary amount of my time goes into shopping (grocery & fabric supplies). Here are my issues, which translate into my time...

1. Prices in the North are more expensive, but my budget is not higher, so to deflect this, I must spend time “shopping around” to [fit within] my budget.
2. I have no access to discount stores such as wholesalers, whereas teachers in the South do. In fact, with the money they save purchasing from wholesalers, many of them can afford to pay for delivery services for remaining groceries from Safeway, etc., and thus pay others to shop for them.

3. Because we are a smaller community, I can't always get what I need in one shop. I can travel to two or more grocery stores only to be told to come back two to three days later when the next delivery truck arrives.
4. Shopping is a very time-consuming challenge which occurs weekly through the entire year.
5. Effect of "no course fees" has had huge impact on Home Ec teachers as it has directly impacted how we deliver our program (Young decision).
6. I now have to do fabric shopping as well."

One Science teacher compares the lack of lab technicians in BC to the situation in Ontario, where teachers are freed up from the organizational details so they can focus more on teaching:

"So much time is spent on prep for Science (new curriculum, lots of labs to set up, marking, large classes thus more time spent marking, record keeping, following up with students and parents). Seriously need to consider hiring lab technicians in each school to set up labs, organize equipment/chemicals, do inventory and ordering. Huge extra workload is put on Science teachers here (Ontario schools have Science tech people to look after setting up all lab activities so teachers can focus more of their energy and attention to actually teaching)."

The comments also indicate that the amount of allocated preparation time is not enough to cover all of the work that needs to be done:

"I have too little prep time during the week to complete all the little tasks like money collection, photocopying, prepping materials for lessons."

"There is never enough time for prep/administrative tasks, even with a prep block. I believe full-time teachers should have one prep block each semester, instead of just one [per year]. This would help but I know I spend a lot of my own time on school work."

"There is not enough time in the day to do all that is required aside of teaching. I often don't have time to go to the bathroom! Why do Ontario teachers teach 6/8 blocks and we have to teach for 7/8 for less pay (in high school)?"

New teachers also commented that the amount of time they spend preparing curriculum is very high, in part due to being a new teacher and having to build up an inventory of resources and curriculum-based materials:

"Being a new teacher, I spend much of my time with preparation and marking. It is overwhelming at times as I still haven't found a balance between work and play. I love what I do and wouldn't want to do anything else. However, I struggle with balance."

"In French Immersion there is very little resource available, almost nothing. The resource centre only has some material for high school, but not Immersion. French is my second language and therefore I had to spend unbelievable amounts of hours on finding appropriate materials for Kindergarten and learning songs, etc. I felt like I was reinventing the wheel, making up my own material. Also I am a new teacher, so everything takes longer."

Adding to the workload of new teachers is the possibility of being assigned to a different position each year of teaching and having to teach a new grade level:

“As a newer teacher I am moved from one position to another and have yet to have the same position in six years of teaching. This last year and now I have finally had a classroom to call my own and was given a split class of Grade 4/5 (30 students). I had taught Grade 5 for one year. Each time a teacher has a new grade it is a learning curve to learn the curriculum and also involves a tremendous amount of preparation time.”

Changing grades taught, moving to new schools, or changes in specialist assignments from year to year also add to a teacher’s workload, as is evidenced by the following comments:

“I have put in many extra hours this year because I was transferred from an all-Math middle school teaching position to an all-French secondary school position.”

“As an English teacher, I spend uncountable hours marking and prepping. Every time I move to a new school (for lay-offs, surplus), I am forced to re-plan most of my unit plans due to changes in texts.”

“Each year (three total) with this district has been a very different year. I am primarily a Resource Teacher. Managing education assistants (EAs), paperwork, and deciphering protocol is very time-consuming. Special Ed time decreases each year, workload remains the same. The remainder of my job (to balance to 1.0 FTE) also differs; the first two years I did teacher prep; needed to develop three programs one year, taught five periods K–6 the second year, and the third year the EI program. Huge time investments for one year each.”

This indicates that there may also be a domino effect on teachers as a whole when assignments are changed due to layoffs and other changes within the system.

The following comment illustrates how increased class size can impact the amount of time teachers have for preparation and curriculum planning:

“I would love to do more working and prep (professionally appropriate), but the trade-off when there are kids needing to talk, and collaboration required (as FI Skills teacher) is just too great. I had 40 more kids last year than in the 22 years before, and I’m just too tired. So I do binge-marking one or two times per term for each class and select projects so that I have essays with Grade 10s, but in-class presentations for Grade 8s, for example. This has been the most meaningful and exhausting time in my career. I cannot sustain this pace.”

Providing prep time for classroom teachers can leave teacher-librarians with little time to service the library:

“As a teacher-librarian we mostly cover preps and don’t have time to circulate, repair, shelve books. We should have mandatory admin time in addition to prep for classes, literacy training. Our libraries are run on extra time and parent support. It needs to change!”

Marking

Some teachers spend a lot of time marking tests and papers outside of the regular school day, especially English teachers:

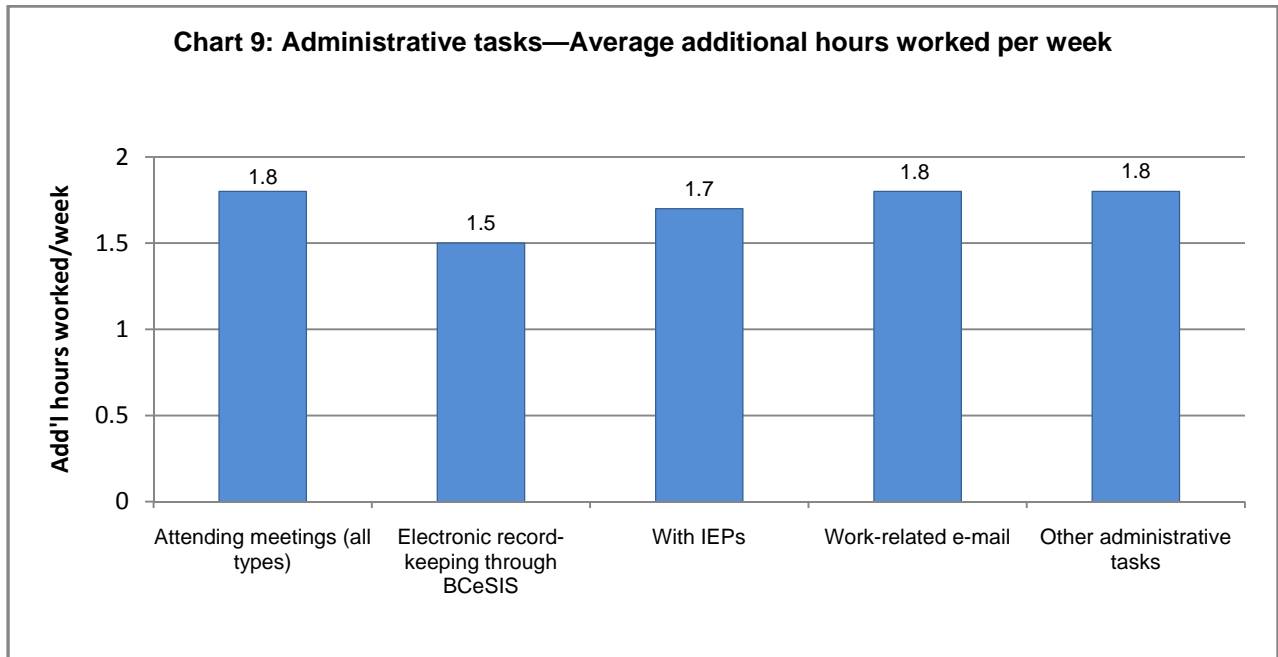
“As an English teacher, marking takes up a significant part of my time. Whenever I attempt to carry out other tasks it is often to the detriment of giving feedback to my students, making me feel like I am not adequately doing my job.”

Another teacher related the increased time spent marking assignments to changing expectations, which may be linked to new requirements for dealing with issues such as zero mark policies, plagiarism, etc.:

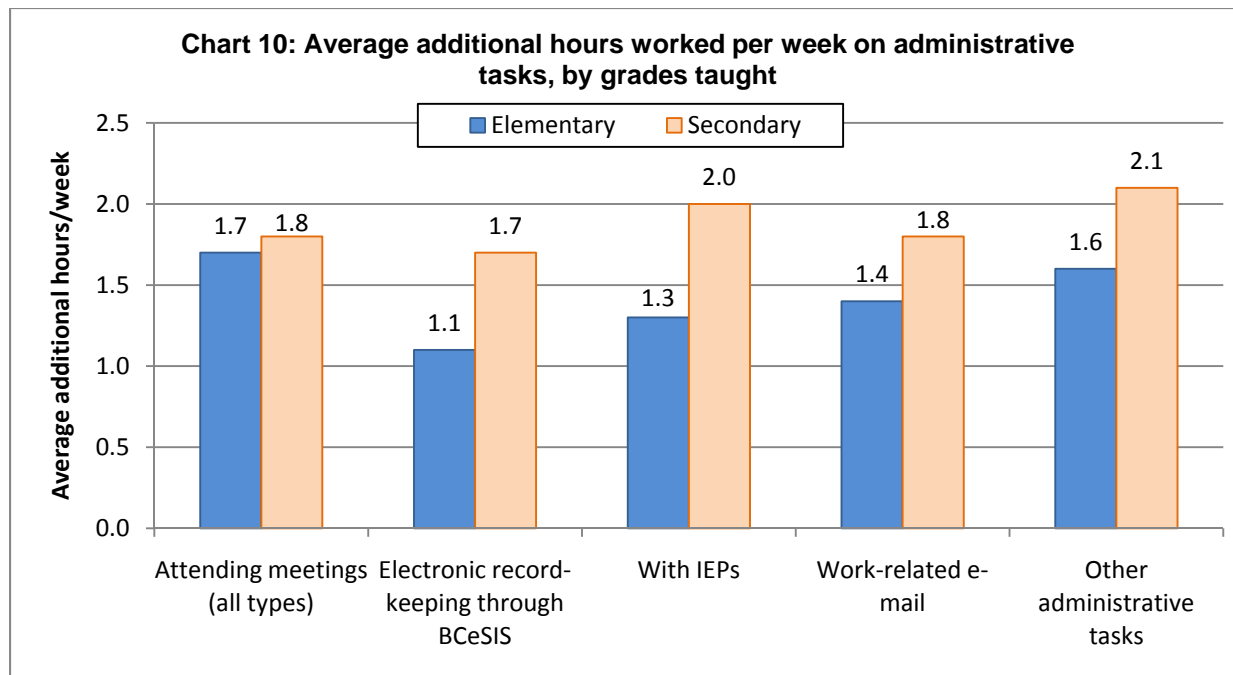
“Not being able to take late marks and having to give students virtually all term or longer increases marking, as towards the end of term a literal flood of overdue work appears. We all have deadlines in life, students should too. There is also an increasing expectation of being able to redo anything which was poorly done. There are always reasons for any of these but as a general rule the amount of extra work they entail is staggering.”

Administrative tasks

The majority of teachers surveyed (84%, see Table 7) spend considerable time each week performing administrative tasks. Chart 9 illustrates that these tasks include attending meetings (1.8 hours), doing work-related e-mail (1.8 hours), and doing other administrative tasks (1.8 hours). About one-quarter of teachers spend additional hours working with IEPs (1.7 hours) or on electronic record-keeping with BCeSIS (1.5 hours).



The survey data show that secondary teachers spend more time (on average) outside of regular work hours on administrative tasks than elementary teachers (Chart 10). Secondary teachers spend more additional hours per week than elementary teachers on all five administrative tasks, with the greatest difference relating to time spent working with BCeSIS (1.7 vs. 1.1 hours) and IEPs (2.0 vs. 1.3 hours).



What teachers say...

Teachers reported spending increased time on administrative tasks such as BCeSIS, e-mail communication, staff/departmental meetings, and paperwork:

“BCeSIS increased reporting time from approximately 10 hours to 60 hours.”

“The trend to work-related e-mail is on the rise. The new breed of administrators uses this medium and wants teachers to use this instead of using the phone or personal contact.”

“Meetings for many reasons usually take place before and/or after school. Too many hours spent in meetings rather than time to plan and discuss student needs with colleagues. Need time in day to meet with EAs.”

Taking on responsibilities of or for the school administrator also adds to teacher workload:

“I have noticed an increase in requests from Administrative Officer to take on additional responsibilities to reduce her workload, e.g., chair committees, call ministry re: student issues.”

“The expectation of administration is for us to take a leadership role in events they think up; it’s endless.”

Class composition emerged as an important aspect of teacher workload. The following comments illustrate how much time teachers spend doing administrative work to support the

unique needs of students in BC classrooms, including extensive paperwork and attending meetings.

Paperwork

“The amount of paperwork has increased significantly over the past few years.”

“I have 12 of 24 Grade 2s who either need ESL, Learning Assistance Centre (LAC), or behaviour support. Three of these children are not functioning at grade level. I have spent countless hours filling out assessments, documenting behaviours and observations to ensure these 12 children receive support they are entitled to.”

“This year I had nine designated students in my divisions. Aside from obvious discipline/management issues, this created a ridiculous number of meetings/paperwork, etc. FYI, there was one education assistant in the class.”

Teachers’ comments indicate that writing Individual Education Plans takes up a considerable amount of a teacher’s time:

“During IEP times, I spend a lot of outside-work-time writing up the IEPs (just like report cards).”

“I have had lots of time spent in meetings and completing paperwork that includes IEPs that goes far beyond an average workweek.”

“I spend the majority of my time working with students or on IEP-related tasks (School-based Team tasks). The paperwork is overwhelming and I am always behind.”

Meetings

“Last year the number of hours for IEPs, meetings, working with students was enormous. I had seven LAC students, one severe behaviour, one unidentified learning disabled and another with mild autism, ADD or something. We couldn’t cover the amount of curriculum required because of the constant problems we were dealing with. I spent many hours per week in meetings or discussions with parents, administration, students, and resource team. I had no SEA help.”

“It varies. It goes from crazy to insane. I’m at every meeting for every student and I type and distribute minutes. I rarely have a day where there is not a meeting after school or an IEP to write. I wish my energy could go into prepping lessons that help children!”

Training new teachers to complete an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Another teacher noted that new resource teachers (RTs) need training in writing IEPs, as they receive little training in this before they arrive at the school:

“A significant portion of my job time is used in training new resource teachers at the school. Frequently there is a new one each year. There is no university training in doing IEPs and very little school-board training either. Often the new RTs have no classroom experience beyond teaching on call, so they need guidance in that as well. Even though I am not technically a sponsor teacher, I am in that role each year with new RTs at my school.”

Other comments

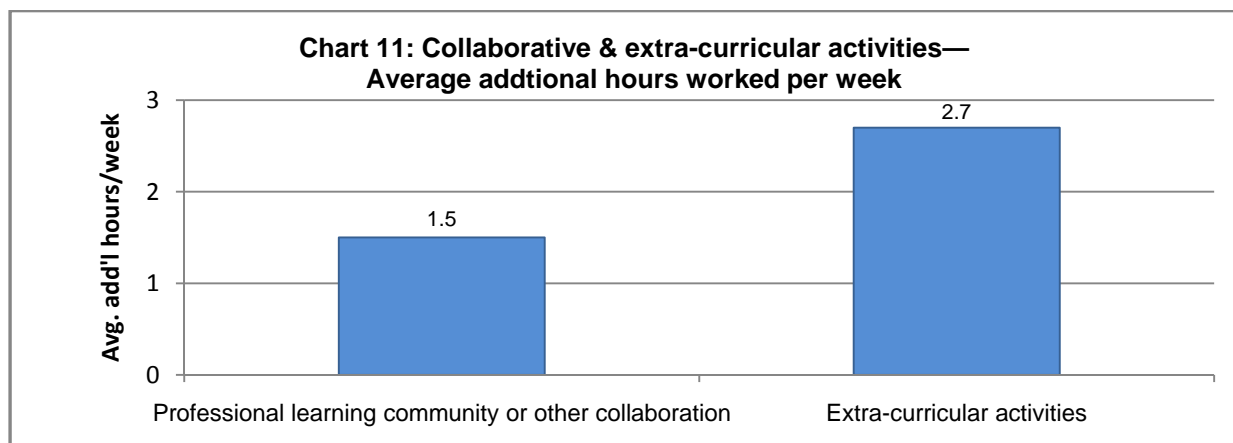
Two teachers noted that teaching was more of a lifestyle or vocation, with administrative tasks being part of the job. One teacher noted that the increasing amount of paperwork took away from the time she could spend with students, while the other expressed concerns about spending time on administrative issues, including the Foundations Skills Assessment (FSA):

“Don’t like the wording of question; my regular day is made up of all those things. I don’t break them apart, or really pay attention to time. It has become a lifestyle, although the amount of paperwork has taken more time over past 10 years and takes me away from time with kids.”

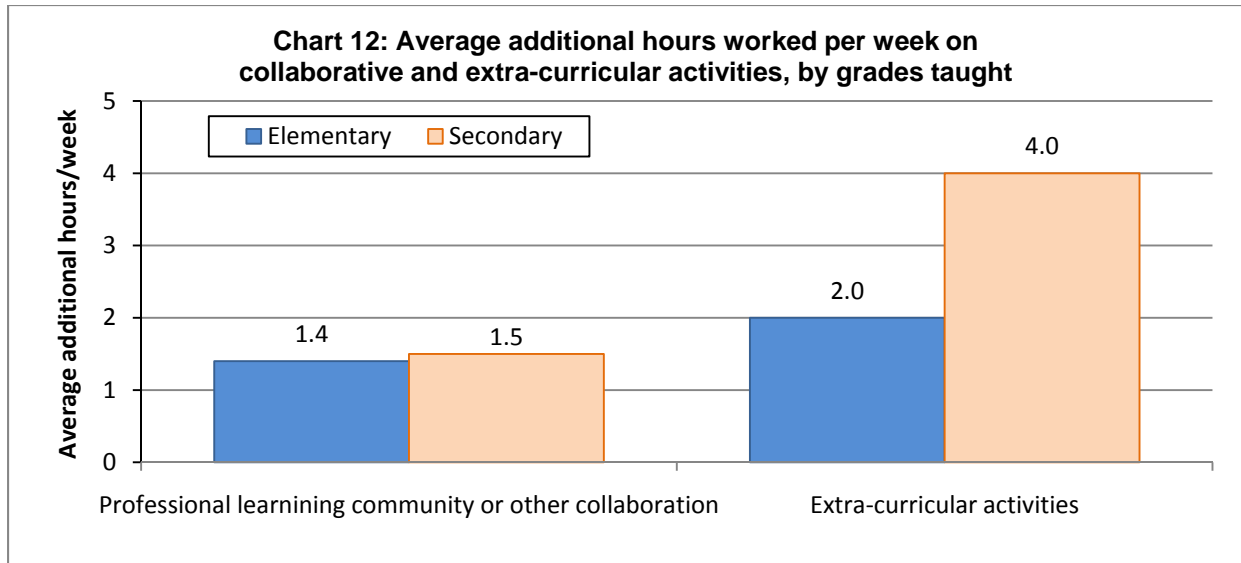
“Teaching is more of a vocation for me than a job, so I don’t begrudge much of the work. But I detest anything that requires me to spend my time in administrative/political butt-covering, especially for things like FSA, with which I have grave professional concerns.”

Professional collaboration and extra-curricular activities

Almost one-half of teachers (44%, see Table 7) are involved in professional learning communities or other forms of collaboration outside the regular workday, spending an average of 1.5 hours per week on this activity (Chart 11). There are no noticeable differences between elementary and secondary teachers relating to participation in this activity.



About half of teachers surveyed (45%, see Table 7) spend time on extra-curricular activities, for an average of 2.7 additional hours per week. Secondary teachers (4.0 hours) spend twice as many hours outside of the regular workday on extra-curricular activities as elementary teachers (2.0 hours) (Chart 12).



What teachers say...

Teachers are involved in a range of extra-curricular activities, including organizing band trips, putting on musical performances, fund-raising, and coaching sports teams and track and field. As these activities are often associated with specific seasons or events, they can increase teacher workload significantly over short periods of time:

“When I am preparing for a Christmas concert, I would probably work an extra 15–20 hours per week (from October to mid-December) in preparation time.”

“I coach during the fall, so the amount of time that I work increases significantly. I tried to average it out with the rest of the year.”

“I coach fall and spring sports, which makes those months very intense in terms of hours. Some of my days may be 10 hours in length, whereas the winter-month days will be shorter.”

“I work less so I can handle all the coaching that is not part of the job but is part of the system!”

A theme that emerges in the teacher comments is the decline in teacher involvement in committees and extra-curricular activities:

“I’ve stopped volunteering for committees because I don’t have the time for meetings.”

“Sadly, less and less time is given over to extra-curricular activities as teachers just feel burned out.”

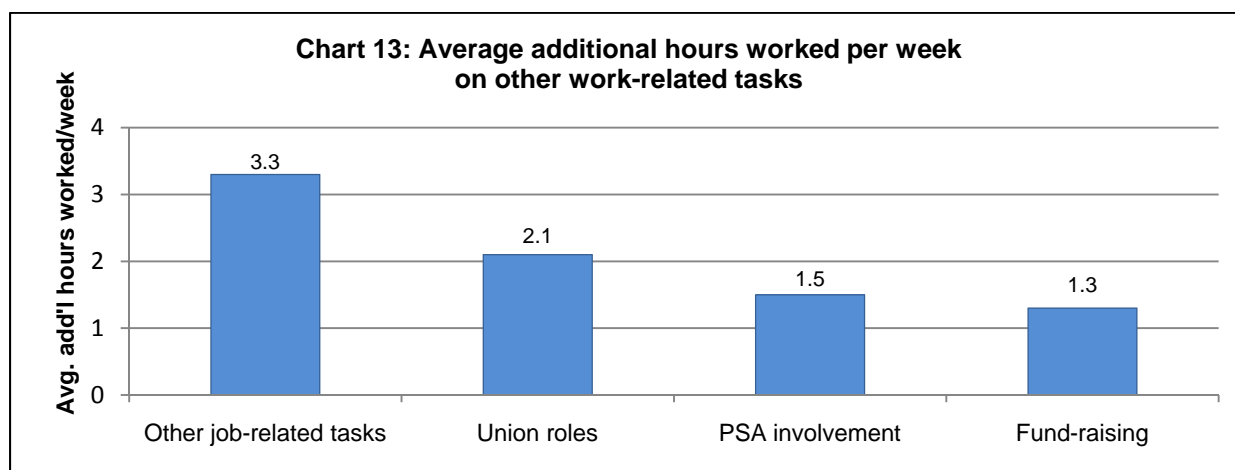
“An overall decline in coaching commitment concerns me. We (our district) seem to be hiring fewer PE specialists. Also the commitment to a team and league appears to be on the decrease.”

“I have had to cut back on or withdraw from activities such as union involvement and extracurricular and committees. These were responsibilities I enjoyed but cannot give them the attention needed to do a good job.”

Other work-related tasks

Some work-related tasks outside of regular work hours involve a small proportion of the sample, with insufficient data to make comparisons (Chart 13). In terms of union involvement, eighty teachers (14%) are involved in union roles, spending an average of 2.1 hours per week on this activity, and 4% of teachers indicate spending time on Provincial Specialist Association (PSA) involvement (Table 7).

Other job-related tasks involve 14% of teachers surveyed (Table 7), but take up a considerable amount of time—3.3 additional hours, on average, per week (Chart 13). The tasks that teachers spend time on outside of regular work hours include purchasing resources such as art supplies and library books, co-ordinating school events, programs, and field trips, technology-related work, cleaning and moving classrooms, mentorship, attending team-based meetings, and acting as a department head.



What teachers say...

Union roles and PSA involvement

The following comment from a teacher involved in union roles, PSAs, mentoring, and other professional committees illustrates the extent to which this deep level of commitment can add significantly to teacher workload:

“I spend many hours on top of the heavy load of preparation all French Immersion teachers have. I encourage my mentees to consider teaching as a hobby as it takes up so much time.”

Other work-related tasks

Some teachers said that communicating with parents and students took up a significant amount of time.

“Most of my extra time beyond direct instruction is directed towards two things: preparation and responding to, dealing with student behaviours, after school with the Principal and Vice-Principal (calling parents), documenting behaviours. This includes talking to resource teachers and counsellor as well. High needs classroom.”

“Significant time is spent responding to a parent regarding a high-needs child. Constant communication is needed to build bridges between school and home and create stability for the child.”

Teachers also commented on other tasks to which they give their time, including offering workshops, cleaning their classroom, photocopying for student assignments, helping to maintain computers, and shopping for art supplies. A myriad of minor activities have an impact on teachers’ time in the school day:

“I do a lot of in-school odd jobs. I take care of the computer lab: turn on machines, replace headsets, fill printer, trouble shoot. I organize both art rooms: order and set the new supplies away. I purchase the milk for staff two days a week, take recycling newspaper and papers away for each week, tidy up gym equipment room.”

Several teachers mentioned performing tasks such as cleaning classrooms and photocopying that were done by support staff prior to budget cuts:

“I spend a lot of hours at school organizing, cleaning up, and decorating the classroom (janitor time has been cut). I spend time on the weekend tracking down materials needed for art and other projects (and I pay for them!). Sometimes it feels like my job has become my life!”

“No support staff available to do photocopying for students’ assignments.”

“We used to have staff assistants who could help with some jobs like prep, copying, working with students, etc.”

“In the absence of adequate library clerical help, library administration clerical tasks need to be completed by me. I have extended library hours for student access.”

The following comment illustrates how a lack of learning resources due to budget cutbacks can impact on teacher workload:

“I have a caseload of 39 ESL students at 0.8 FTE, divided into 12 groups. Much of my prep time/own time before and after school is spent on planning lessons for the groups and photocopying materials, as we no longer have disposable materials for our students due to budget cutbacks.”

The impact of working on teaching activities during evenings and weekends

Some teachers also spoke of how the demands of teaching make it difficult to achieve a work/life balance:

“Family time is frequently eaten up by school time. There is always something that needs doing, planning, prepping, or improving.”

“The one thing I dislike about my job is that my workday never seems to be over when I leave school. It is a rare day or weekend if I don’t have some kind of school work to do (whether it is marking, writing up notices, planning a unit, arranging drivers for a field trip or track meet, etc.)!”

Two teachers noted the impact of excessive workload on their health and well-being:

“I am exhausted of the end of my workday with no energy left for a personal life.”

“I am drained when I come home to my own two young kids. If I could afford to stay home I would; the job takes its toll on my emotional and physical health.”

The comments suggest that excessive workload is eroding job satisfaction, and may be causing some teachers to leave the profession:

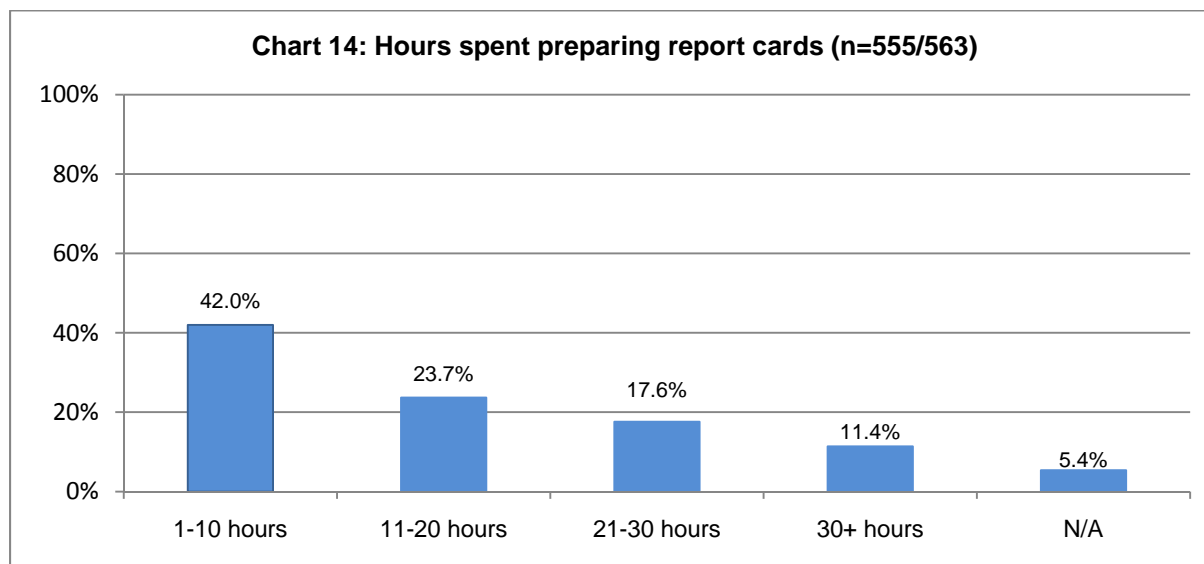
“After eight years of full-time teaching, I left teaching for a more fulfilling and better-paying career. During the eight years I spent in education, I worked mornings, evenings, and weekends coaching, marking, and planning. In my opinion the workload and expectations placed on teachers makes the job unattractive, and the workplace environment very negative.”

“Public perception is sometimes that teachers work 9:00 to 3:00 with lots of holidays. We need to inform the public how all-encompassing teaching is. Some days and nights are preoccupied with solutions for students. We lose young teachers because they are not prepared for the workload and level of accountability.”

Preparing report cards and BCeSIS⁵

Report cards

The survey asked teachers how much time they spent preparing their last set of report cards. The amount of time teachers spent preparing report cards varied considerably, with 42% spending from 1 to 10 hours, and 29% spending 21 or more hours (Chart 14). These differences may be due to many factors, including the range or type of subjects and the grade levels taught by teachers, the number of students in the class, and the composition of the class.



⁵ British Columbia enterprise Student Information System.

What teachers say...

Many teachers indicated stress associated with completing report cards, especially the time needed to complete them in addition to day-to-day teaching:

“Stressful to do this task plus keep up with marking and preparation. It’s like another full workweek on top of an already full week.”

“Term end and report cards equal a very stressful two weeks. My teaching suffers because I am spending nights/weekends working on them. I find myself rationalizing; something’s got to give.”

“All this time on reports means I’m less prepared each day, less marking is up-to-date, and the cost to my home life is enormous.”

“Report-card time is extremely stressful for me. I’m usually trying to finish marking assignments or projects. All of the work for report cards has to be done outside of the 30 hours of school time, yet I still have to prep for my lessons, etc. I’d estimate I work an extra eight hours on the weekend for this.”

“It is a very laborious task and the terrible thing is that it takes away from our teaching as the assessment takes too long and we are too tired to teach because our evenings/weekends are spent doing report cards.”

Many teachers reported that they did not receive enough time to work on report cards, and spent countless hours at home working on this arduous task:

“Need to have time off to do reports. Very stressful time doing individual report cards.”

“We should not be expected to do reports at home on our own time. At least one day per term near the due date should be provided.”

Some teachers called for a province-wide checklist to ease the writing of report cards, as well as to add consistency to a process that is often different according to school district:

“I understand report-card-writing is part of the job; however, a lot of time is spent preparing and writing; perhaps a checklist so they’re less cumbersome?”

“I would like to see a standard report card for the provinces. Many of the particular work habits or behaviours could be indicated in a checklist.”

“In our district we have never been allowed to have a checklist format for our report cards. Both primary and intermediate report cards are anecdotal, which require many, many hours of preparation. Intermediate also have letter grades. Will there ever be a province-wide report card (checklist format with learning outcomes for each subject area) that all districts would be required to use?”

Another issue that concerned some teachers was that many perceived that the hard work they put into writing report cards was not appreciated by or useful for parents:

“The report cards take far too much time and do not accomplish the desired result. Students and parents still look at the letter grade and seldom read the comments. If they want to know why their child received a particular mark they want to hear it from the teacher. A few comments about each subject do not satisfy most parents.”

“We say/do more than parents respond to.”

“I feel report cards for Kindergarten and primary are quite an inappropriate method of grading and of communicating with parents. It is much healthier and effective to really have a lot of parent involvement in the class and talk a lot with them about their child’s day at school. It seems almost harmful to tell a five-year-old that they should be able to do a certain task and because they are unable to they are deficient and behind the others.”

Two teachers summarized some of the many issues around report cards:

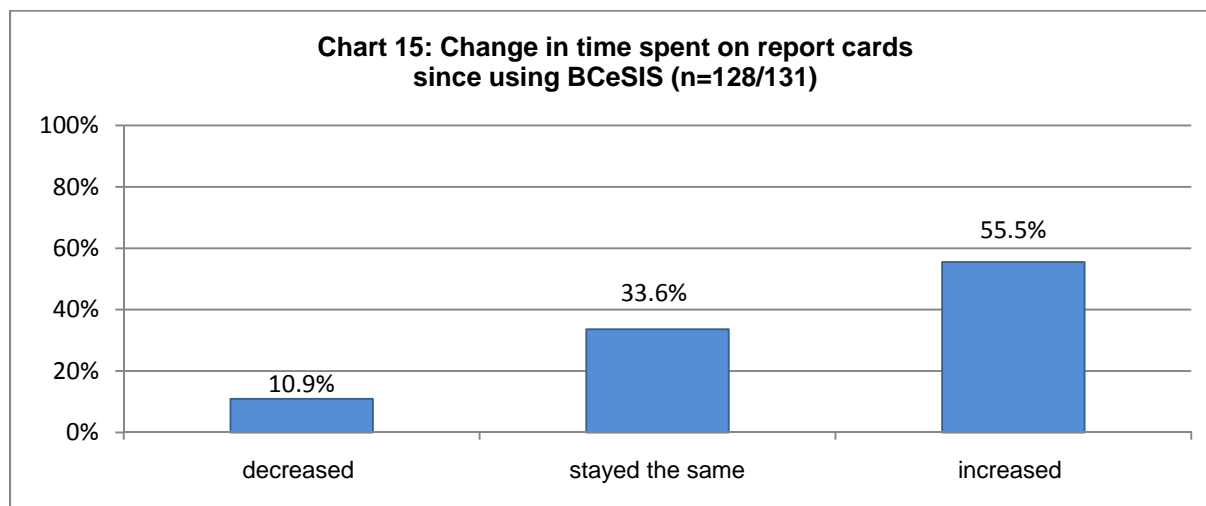
“I think that we are encouraged to write too many comments on our report cards. Parents basically want to know in general that their children are doing fine and if there are areas of concern. They don’t need all the details on each learning outcome as we are encouraged to write. Report cards should be more concise.”

“In my teaching career I have never used the same report-card format for more than four years in a row. Each time it changes it has added more detail to go home to parents. Parents and students are still only interested in the letter grade. More time spent doing report cards does not improve student performance. In fact, less is being taught because of time taken for reports.”

Preparing report cards with BCeSIS

The British Columbia enterprise Student Information System (BCeSIS) is the database program designed to collect and report information about students with the aim of having information on all students in the elementary and secondary systems in BC in one database. The *Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey* included a question asking teachers if they currently used BCeSIS to prepare report cards and, if so, how this had changed the amount of time spent on this task, compared to pre-BCeSIS reporting.

One-quarter⁶ of teachers said they currently used BCeSIS to prepare report cards. About half (55.5%) of these teachers said BCeSIS increased the amount of time they spent preparing report cards compared to previously, one-third (33.6%) said they spent about the same amount of time as before, and one in ten (10.9%) said BCeSIS decreased the amount of time they spent on report cards (Chart 15).



⁶ Based on the 536 responses to the question “Do you currently use BCeSIS to prepare report cards?”

What teachers say...

When respondents were asked to make comments on any significant issues relating to report cards, many of the responses were about BCeSIS, even though only one-quarter (24.4%) of those surveyed were actually using BCeSIS for report cards at the time of the survey. Many of the comments were related to how “unfriendly” the program was to use:

“BCeSIS is always freezing, dropping connections, not teacher-friendly, i.e., putting each grade in separately, not being able to use Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) (not in BCeSIS, have to import one at a time), no consideration of what teachers need in a reporting system.”

“BCeSIS is a very time-consuming and user-unfriendly program/system which was obviously designed by someone who is not a teacher. Our report cards have decreased in quality since BCeSIS was mandated and teachers’ stress and frustration has increased.”

“BCeSIS is not teacher-friendly. The amount of time wasted this year was unacceptable. Last Sunday it was shut down for seven hours for maintenance. You never know which program to use; Safari, or Firefox. I couldn’t cut and paste the same way from one day to the other. Each subject is on a separate file. It has been a nightmare.”

“[In this district] BCeSIS is required for report cards. This is a poor program which is NOT user-friendly. It requires about seven keystrokes to do what you would do in another program with one. There is no spell check, and cut and paste from Word requires editing, as eSIS changes some of the characters. Very awkward program!”

Other complaints reiterated some of the concerns mentioned above regarding specific design flaws and infrastructure problems, including a lack of features, excessive steps for small tasks, freezing, dropped connections, and slowness:

“BCeSIS needs to have a spell check for comments. BCeSIS is slow to access during report card time. BCeSIS needs to fix the issue. BCeSIS should not be shut down during report preparation time.”

“BCeSIS seems to be designed from the top down. It is a terrible program. It requires two hands to enter marks and scroll down and very slow program. No spellcheck. One of the worst programs I’ve ever used.”

“BCeSIS is pathetically slow and cumbersome. I can only think that no other ‘professional’ groups would have to put up with using such a terrible program. It is terrible because since September when I began using it, not a single improvement has been made that benefits me as a teacher (and the program is littered with problems). My time wasted on BCeSIS is not at report cards, it is DAILY as I enter marks into this cumbersome program.”

“BCeSIS is so unpredictable. I feel like I’m using a program from the 1980s.”

“BCeSIS is an antiquated computer program. It is an insult to the computer.”

“BCeSIS is a frustrating tool that often freezes and/or loses data!”

Some teachers made note of the impact using BCeSIS technology had on students:

“Time and money on BCeSIS does not directly add to student learning. Takes time away for the sake of the data.”

“BCeSIS was instituted without working out the bugs. It is still difficult at times to sign in. Sitting at the computer first thing in the morning prevents that first personal contact with my students.”

A few respondents had somewhat positive comments about using the system:

“BCeSIS is not as good a system (quality), but when it is running properly it takes me way less time to do my reports.”

“Overall I like using BCeSIS; however, a spell-check would make it more user-friendly. I understand it is coming.”

Some reported that they maintained their marks in another program and merely used BCeSIS to put in the mark for the report cards:

“BCeSIS has NOT made it easier, faster, or more efficient. Constant frustration from day one. Wish it was gone. I won’t even attempt to use it to track my marks—I prepare my marks in a separate program and then just input into ESIS.”

“District strongly encourages BCeSIS reporting system. I prepare my marks using an independent program called MarkBook and transfer final percentages to BCeSIS as required. BCeSIS has not proved reliable enough for me to ‘put all my eggs in the same basket.’ ”

The emotion that BCeSIS raises for some was reflected in the following comments:

“When I was doing report cards with BCeSIS it nearly drove me to distraction—I felt physically sick trying to make a dysfunctional system work for me.”

“BCeSIS is extremely disrespectful to teachers and their time. I am shocked that we accept it.”

“BCeSIS is an absolutely rotten system; it never, ever works properly, and has added a great many new headaches to an already inadequate system of reporting.”

Summary

The findings on teacher workload challenge the perception that teaching is a “9:00 to 3:00” job. This study shows that full-time teachers are working hours well over the standard workweek, with a considerable amount of the work taking place on evenings and weekends. During the hours that school is in session, teachers have very little time to attend to the growing administrative demands on their time, to do marking, or to prepare classroom materials. Much of this work spills over into their personal time. Many teachers are also involved in extra-curricular activities outside of the regular school day.

Quantitative results

Hours worked

Full-time teachers in this survey work an average of 47.8 hours per week, with 1 in 10 teachers working 60 or more hours per week. Part-time teachers in the survey work, on average, a total of 31.4 hours per week. About one-third of part-time teachers indicated how many unpaid hours they work per week in addition to their full-time equivalent (FTE) assignment. On average, these part-time teachers work 7.3 unpaid hours.

Almost all teachers surveyed work before and after school and evenings, and about three-quarters work on school-related tasks on weekends. On average, older, more-experienced teachers work more before and after school and evenings than less-experienced teachers, while the opposite is the case for weekends.

Additional time spent on school-related activities

Teachers spend a significant amount of time outside of the regular workday on school-related tasks, most-commonly on classroom preparation (88%), attending meetings (84%), marking (76%), work-related e-mail (74%), and working with students outside of class (70%). Doing preparation (6.6 hours) and marking (4.5 hours) take up the most amount of extra time each week. Administrative tasks also take up considerable time for many teachers, ranging from an average of 1.5 to 1.8 hours per week, depending on the task.

Teachers, especially in secondary programs, spend considerable time outside of the regular school day on extra-curricular activities, including coaching, fund-raising, committees, planning concerts, and other school events. Almost one-half of teachers (44%) are involved in a professional learning community or another form of collaboration. In terms of union involvement, 4% of respondents are involved in Provincial Specialist Associations, and 14% are in union roles.

BCeSIS and report cards

The survey asked teachers how much time they spent preparing their last set of report cards. The amount of time teachers spent preparing report cards varied considerably, with 42% spending from 1 to 10 hours and 29% spending 21 or more hours. These differences may be due to the range or type of subjects, grade level of students, class size, and composition of the class. One in four teachers used the BC enterprise Student Information System (BCeSIS) to prepare report cards, with half spending more time preparing report cards than before BCeSIS. Only one in ten of these teachers said BCeSIS decreased the amount of time they spent on report cards.

Qualitative results

Preparation time

The qualitative comments provide many insights into workload issues of concern to BC teachers. Classroom preparation is the work that teachers spend the most time on outside the regular school day, and it is the issue about which they had the most to say. Having to change grades, schools, or teaching assignments due to instability in the education system was also identified as a factor influencing preparation time. New teachers in particular said they spend a lot of time preparing instructional materials, not knowing if they will teach the same grade or course the following year. Several teachers commented that their preparation time had increased due to a loss of support-staff positions in the school to assist with photocopying and other assistance with teaching activities. Teachers' comments either directly stated or implied that current assigned prep time is not enough to cover all that classroom preparation involves.

Class size and composition

The qualitative comments provide insight into how increased class size and the changing composition of students in the classroom intensify teacher workload. Some teachers expressed concern that lack of support for the increased number of students and/or increased administrative demands related to students with special needs take too much time away from instruction and individual attention to students. The comments reveal that teachers are spending a considerable amount of time preparing lesson plans, completing required paperwork, and attending meetings for each designated student in their class. As the number of students per class with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) increases, so too does the workload of the teacher. The survey results reveal that inadequate support for students with special needs is a significant source of stress for teachers, as are classes that exceed legislated limits for class size and composition⁷.

Extra-curricular activities

In terms of extra-curricular activities, teachers commented on how their workload intensifies during those times of the year when they are involved in sporting or other school events. Some teachers indicated cutting back on extra-curricular activities and union work, as their increased workload as teachers makes it difficult to take on these responsibilities.

Work/life balance

The qualitative comments reveal that some teachers are struggling with work/life balance because teaching spills over into family time or teaching uses up so much of their energy that they have little left for their personal lives. The comments also indicate that excessive teaching workloads may be causing some teachers to leave the profession⁸.

MW:afay:tfeu

⁷ See [Chapter 6, Sources of work-related stress and changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction](#) and [Chapter 8, Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers, and the perspective of all teachers](#).

⁸ See [Chapter 6, Sources of work-related stress and changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction](#).