THE WORKLIFE OF BC TEACHERS IN 2009

A BCTF study of working and learning conditions

Charlie Naylor and Margaret White
BCTF Research | October 2010
Acknowledgments

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Joanne Enquist (Information Technology) published the project on the BCTF website.

Jennifer Sowerby (Graphics) designed chapter cover pages.

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Executive Summary

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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.
Executive Summary

Introduction

The Research Department of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation conducted a survey of public school teachers to assess working and learning conditions in BC schools. The Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey collected information from teachers about demographic and employment characteristics, education and professional development, workload issues, summer break, job satisfaction and stress, if and why they were considering leaving the teaching profession, and teachers’ priority areas for BCTF bargaining and advocacy to improve working and learning conditions.

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2009 with a random sample of 2,502 active members of the BC Teachers’ Federation. The survey yielded 563 valid responses1 (23% response rate) with completed surveys from 54 of the 60 school districts in BC.

Demographic and teaching characteristics

The survey respondents are similar to BC public school teachers in terms of gender and full-time/part-time teaching contract. Older, more-experienced teachers are over-represented, while less-experienced, younger teachers are under-represented. This should be considered when interpreting the results.

Survey respondents are well-distributed across K to 12 grade levels. However, Adult Education teachers make up a very small proportion of respondents. About one in five respondents (111) is a learning specialist teacher, working in a total of 145 FTE assignments. About one-third of learning specialist teachers also teach in enrolling positions, with an average enrolling assignment of 0.39 FTE.

In terms of the socio-economic environment of the school, 22.6% of respondents teach in low-income areas, 39.4% in mixed-income areas, and 29.6% in middle-income areas. Only 8.5% of respondents teach in a school in a high-income neighbourhood.

One in five teachers responding to the survey works part-time. Almost all of them are female and are over-represented in the 35-to-44-year-old age group. About half teach part-time for personal reasons, while one in five reduced their FTE assignment as a strategy to cope with workload.

Leaves and illness

Absenteism due to illness is quite low among teachers responding to the survey, with most teachers being absent from 0 to 5 days in the school year. About one in eight teachers (12.4%) surveyed was on an unpaid or paid leave at the time of the survey. Teachers on leave are more likely to be female and between 35 to 44 years of age compared to the overall sample. About half of teachers on leave indicate that workload issues contributed to their decision to take a leave.

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1Random sample calculations show that 563 responses based on a population of 38,764 active BCTF members is sufficient to achieve results that fall within a five-percent margin of error and 95% confidence intervals for a random sample. See http://www.custominsight.com/articles/random-sample-calculator.asp
Teachers’ education and professional development

Most respondents hold a bachelor’s degree, with teacher training program (48%) or a university certificate or diploma above bachelor level (26%), while 25% have completed a master’s degree. Most (87%) are not enrolled in formal education programs, which likely reflects the high proportion of teachers with qualifications beyond bachelor level. The survey findings indicate that teachers who wish to upgrade to a graduate degree in education may have difficulty doing so. About half of those not planning to enrol in an education program state family obligations (27.3%) or financial restraints (26.8%) as impediments, with some gender differences apparent.

Teachers have much to say about professional development (PD). The qualitative analysis reveals both positive and negative influences at school and district administrative levels, and a difference in values between those who see PD as consumers looking through and choosing from a list of options, and those teachers who are exercising autonomy in ways that create professional development, often in collaboration with peers. Respondents would like to see greater funding for PD and more self-directed, collaborative opportunities. There also appears to be significant support for mentoring of new teachers. Almost two-thirds of respondents said they would like to participate in mentoring either as a mentor or mentee.

Workload issues for BC teachers

The survey results suggest that full-time teachers are working hours well over the standard workweek, with a considerable amount of the work taking place during evenings and weekends. Full-time teachers in this survey work an average of 47.8 hours per week, with one in ten teachers working 60 or more hours per week. Part-time teachers work, on average, a total of 31.4 hours per week. About one-third reported how many unpaid hours they work per week in addition to their full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching assignment. On average, these part-time teachers work 7.3 hours additional hours per week. Most teachers work on school-related tasks before and after school and evenings, during recess and lunch breaks, and on weekends.

Teachers spend several hours outside of the regular workday on school-related tasks, most-commonly on classroom preparation, attending meetings, marking work, and working with students outside of class. Doing preparation and marking take up the most amount of time outside of the regular work day. 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 the secondary program, spend considerable time outside of the regular school day on extra-curricular activities. Almost one-half of teachers are involved in a professional learning community or some other form of collaboration. In terms of union involvement, 14% of respondents are in union roles and 4% of respondents are involved in Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs). A few teachers commented that they have reduced the time they spend on extra-curricular activities or doing union work, as their increased workload makes it difficult to take on these responsibilities.

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2 The average hours per week may be an under-estimate, as a stringent definition was used in the calculation, which included teachers who identified as full-time who indicated working only 30 hours per week. Caution should be used in comparing this result to other surveys.
How teachers spent their time on the summer break

On average, teachers took a break (e.g., vacation, time off) for 5.7 weeks during the 2008–09 summer break. The findings suggest that over the course of a teaching career, teachers are increasingly able to take time off during the summer. The youngest (35%) and least-experienced teachers (63%) took a break for 0 to 3 weeks compared to 13% of the oldest teachers and the most-experienced teachers. Half of teachers with 25 or more years teaching experience took a break for 7 or more weeks, while only 6% of teachers with less than five years’ experience did so.

The descriptive qualitative analysis reveals that many teachers spent the first few weeks of the break recuperating from the hectic demands of the school year, attending to personal responsibilities put on hold during the school year, and caring for dependent or ill family members. While many teachers recuperated within one to two weeks, a few teachers seemed to be greatly affected by job stress and reported taking longer to recover.

Respondents were engaged in many types of teaching-related activities over the summer break. Most teachers spent time completing year-end tasks (0.7 weeks on average) and preparing for the upcoming school year (1.2 weeks, on average). Some teachers expressed frustration about how the instability of grade or course assignments made it very difficult to plan and prepare for the upcoming school year.

Teachers were also engaged in various types of professional upgrading and reading. Almost half (44%) spent time reading educational journals and books for an average of 1.3 weeks. About one in ten teachers surveyed took educational courses. On average, they spent 2.5 weeks taking courses, with about one-quarter of these teachers spending 4 or more weeks on this activity. Some teachers (17%) attended district PD activities during the summer break, for an average of 0.6 weeks.

While only a small proportion of teachers worked in some type of paid employment during the summer, this activity took up a considerable amount of their summer break. Those teachers who taught summer school (6.2%) spent an average of 4.2 weeks doing so; for teachers with other education-related employment (6.6%) the average time spent was 2.9 weeks, and those who engaged in non-teaching employment (9%) spent an average of 3.8 weeks doing so.

BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work

One qualitative part of this study explores what makes teachers satisfied in their work and what is most stressful about their work. The analysis of written responses shows that many teachers clearly love teaching and gain immense satisfaction from a vocation which they see as instrumental in supporting children’s learning and development. The study findings provide further evidence that teacher-student relationships and interactions are the primary causes of satisfaction, yet other positive interactions, with peers and parents, and some level of autonomy, are also important factors which contribute to teacher satisfaction. On the converse side, it almost always appears that it is the combining of factors which stresses teachers, such as multiple demands/limited time, classroom complexity in terms of class size and composition, lack of supports in general, and limited levels of support for dealing with student behaviour. Stress appears to be most severe when several sources of stress occur at the same time.
Most significant sources of stress

Of the 47 sources of stress listed in the survey, teachers rate level of support for students with disruptive behaviour, class composition issues, level of support for non-designated, grey area students, and the unmet needs of students as the four most significant sources of stress. At least 60% of respondents rate these factors as high stress or very-high stress. The attitude of the provincial government is rated as the fifth highest source of stress for teachers, slightly higher than inclusion issues. Class size, and testing and assessment, also rank in the top-ten most-significant stressors.

Job insecurity is increasingly an issue for newer teachers due to the steady erosion of teaching positions in BC over the past decade. The survey findings suggest that teachers teaching on call (TTOC) experience very high stress levels associated with job insecurity/concerns about employment, as do teachers with less than five years experience, or who are less than 35 years of age.

Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of stress

The survey findings suggest that many teachers are experiencing stress from excessive workload, and few have energy left at the end of the workday. About half of teachers indicate that they find keeping up with the demands of their workload as a teacher stressful or that they have difficulty “turning off” thoughts or concerns about work during personal time, most or all of the time. Only one in five teachers indicate that they usually have energy left at the end of the day, after completing teaching responsibilities.

Teachers’ responses are more divided in terms of how much work interferes with their work/life balance. One-third of respondents report that work interferes with family or personal life and one-third report having good work/life balance, most or all of the time.

Learning specialist teachers and inclusion issues

The survey collected data on both the work and perceptions of those specialists teaching in Special Education and/or Learning Assistance, concerning their roles. Data on inclusionary issues were also collected from all respondents. Time allocations for Special Education teachers averaged 0.54 FTE, and for Learning Assistance teachers 0.42 FTE, data which confirm role fragmentation and reduced specialist time-allocations for supporting inclusion. The fragmentation of the role of Special Education and Learning Assistance teachers was initially identified in a 2004 BCTF report.

Three-quarters of Special Education teachers report that workload is higher now than it was five years ago. For all respondents, issues around inclusion are significant stressors, with a high level of concern about lack of supports to address behaviour and to meet the needs of grey area students. For both learning specialist teachers and classroom teachers, concerns are primarily linked to what they see as conditions which limit their capacity to meet the needs of all students.

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3 In the past, learning specialist teachers were known as non-enrolling teachers.
Changes in workload, stress, and job satisfaction

The survey findings provide evidence that working and learning conditions have deteriorated over the last five years. At least two-thirds of the teachers surveyed say their stress level and workload increased compared to five years ago and four out of ten report decreased job satisfaction. A comparison of demographic characteristics reveals few differences in which teacher groups experienced increased stress or increased workload compared to five years ago. This suggests that increases in workload and stress levels over the last five years are pervasive, affecting teachers across BC, independent of age, gender, experience, employment contract, or grades taught.

Reasons teachers are considering leaving the profession

One in five teachers say they are considering leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement, with teachers who are mid-career being the most likely to consider doing so. Descriptive analysis of written responses reveals several reasons these teachers are considering leaving the teaching profession, including increased workload, stress and burnout, health conditions aggravated by stress, lack of encouragement, job insecurity, and dissatisfaction with provincial and district governance. Some teachers also comment that deteriorating learning and working conditions make it harder to feel effective as a teacher. Six in ten teachers say they would recommend teaching as a profession to others and one-third say they would not.

Teachers’ priority areas for BCTF bargaining and advocacy

The survey asked teachers to rate the level of importance of 13 areas for the BCTF to focus on in collective bargaining and advocacy to improve working and learning conditions. The five most important areas of focus (in order of importance) are improved support for Special Education, more time for planning and preparation, reduced class size, and improvements in salary and benefits. At least 60% of teachers in the survey ranked these areas of focus as quite important or very important.

Priorities differ among teacher groups. Female teachers rate (on average) all areas of focus except for improving salary and benefits as more important than male teachers do. Secondary teachers assign a higher priority to providing more time for planning and prep, addressing issues with BCeSIS, programs to support wellness and work/life balance, and improving salaries and benefits. Elementary teachers rate the importance of improving support for Special Education and ESL students considerably higher than do secondary teachers. Teachers with less than 10 years’ experience assign higher importance to improving resources (e.g., books, computers) and opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers. Newer teachers rate technology concerns as less important than do their more-experienced peers.
Implications and discussion

The qualitative findings show that many teachers clearly love teaching and gain immense satisfaction from a vocation which they see as instrumental in developing children’s learning and development.

However, for many teachers it is the combination of factors that produces the most stress and which may have severe consequences. The most significant sources of stress for teachers relate to classroom conditions: level of support for students with disruptive behaviour, class composition issues, level of support for non-designated, grey area students, and the unmet needs of students were the four most significant sources of stress. These findings imply that strategies to reduce teacher stress need to be part of a more comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses the combination of factors that most contributes to teacher stress.

This study provides evidence that most teachers are working many hours outside of the regular work day on a range of school-related activities, with administrative and reporting requirements taking up an increasing amount of their time. The survey findings indicate that, in the view of respondents, working and learning conditions are worsening, with at least two-thirds of teachers (who have been teaching for five years or more) experiencing increased stress levels and workload compared to five years ago, and 40% reporting decreased job satisfaction. These changes appear to be pervasive, affecting teachers across demographic groups, implying that strategies to reduce workload and stress would be of benefit to teachers across the board.

Increased workload and stress for teachers may be a consequence of the significant reduction in teaching positions arising from a growing funding crisis in BC’s public education system. Data from this study suggest that this reduction has increased workload for classroom teachers and reduced support provided by specialist teachers. With severe cuts expected in the 2010–11 school year, the implications are problematic for an education system in which teacher workload is already a significant issue. The survey results indicate that excessive workloads contribute to teachers being on medical leave, especially for a stress-related illness/disability. If workload increases and specialist support decreases due to cuts in teaching positions in the 2010–11 year and beyond, there may be increased stress-related claims in the coming years.

Increased teacher workload and stress, and loss of job satisfaction, have considerable implications for students in the classroom and for teachers’ quality of work life, and will likely affect teacher retention in future years. There is evidence from other empirical studies that excessive teacher workloads, and problematic conditions in classrooms, cause teacher burnout and negatively impact students’ learning.5 This survey found that one in five teachers is considering leaving the profession, with some of these teachers identifying increased workload, stress, and burn-out as reasons influencing their perspective.

The study results indicate that teachers view their working conditions as fundamentally linked to the conditions that support student learning, and that they want to see improvements to working conditions that give students better chances of success. One key set of evidence for this claim is that while pay and benefits are stressed by many teachers as directions they want the union to pursue, respondents place addressing working conditions linked to student learning as a slightly-higher priority than improving their own pay and benefits.

Executive Summary

Perhaps it is time to recognize and build on positive aspects of teaching, for the benefit of teachers and students. For individuals, schools, unions, and employers (districts), an awareness of the negative impact of these combinations may also be of utility in addressing individual issues or combinations of factors which cause stress. This suggests that a more exploratory approach might be useful in some areas, involving greater discussion with or among teachers to consider options and possible directions. Another exploratory area might involve generating more debate among teachers and within the union about priorities for professional development. Pursuing the option of a mentorship program may also improve the quality of work life for BC teachers. Opening up more conversations on the positive and the problematic in teachers’ work may engage teachers, employers, and unions in better and more collaborative ways to take positive control, and to better manage professional relationships and work.

Future research directions

The study identifies some issues that require further exploration. As new teachers are under-represented in this survey, further research is needed to explore how the instability of the public education system is affecting younger, less-experienced teachers, and to what extent bargaining and other priorities differ between the least- and most-experienced teachers.

Gender differences are apparent, possibly due to work/life balance issues. Almost all of the part-time teachers in the survey are female, with over half working part-time for personal reasons. One in five part-time teachers does so as a way to cope with workload, effectively using their own unpaid time for marking and preparation. Female teachers are more likely to say family obligations pose a barrier to pursuing graduate studies. Female teachers place more importance on improving classroom conditions than on improving salary and benefits. With the increased feminization of teaching, gender issues may have been under-studied and may require more in-depth attention.

Finally, the finding that one in five teachers is considering leaving the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement is of great concern. The survey asked teachers to explain their reasons for wanting to leave teaching, and the qualitative data generated some useful insights as to the factors influencing teachers to consider leaving the profession. Further research is needed to fully validate these qualitative findings and to further explore the implications for teacher retention.

The BCTF Research team appreciates the contribution of BC teachers, whose input enabled us to generate this study of the working lives of teachers in our public schools.
Introduction, study design, and response rate

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Senior Researcher, BCTF Research

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.
Introduction

Welcome to *The Worklife of British Columbia Teachers in 2009* study. This study was conducted in the spring of 2009, eight years after the previous BCTF research project on the worklife of BC teachers, done in 2001. In both studies, BCTF Research staff designed and administered the survey instrument to a random sample of BC’s public-school teachers. In both studies, data analysis was conducted by BCTF staff, and a series of reports produced; the 2001 reports were published both on the BCTF web site\(^1\) and in hard copy\(^2\).

While there are some similarities between the 2001 and the 2009 studies in terms of data collected, the 2009 survey\(^3\) was structured in four sections:

**A. Background information**  
Demographics, leaves and illness, type of contract, enrolling and non-enrolling subject/work area(s), grade(s) taught, education and professional development

**B. Workload issues**  
Hours worked, report cards, summer break

**C. Views on working conditions and sources of stress**  
Work-related stress, job satisfaction, changes over the past five years

**D. Effects of stress and possible solutions**

As a part of the 2001 study, a literature review was compiled that focused on existing literature in terms of teacher workload, with the goal of comparing the BC findings to research in other jurisdictions. At that time, there appeared to be remarkable similarity in terms of the findings such as the long hours worked, and considerable stress attributable to various demands, frequently-changing expectations, and limited support for diverse student populations. A collection of current teacher worklife research from BCTF, Canadian, and international sources has been compiled for the 2009 study.

The 2009 BCTF study format and dissemination

Results of the 2009 study are being shared with BCTF members and locals in the following reports:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction, study design, and response rate
- Chapter 1: Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey
- Chapter 2: Teachers’ education and professional development: Experiences and perspectives
- Chapter 3: Workload issues for BC teachers
- Chapter 4: How teachers spent their summer break
- Chapter 5: BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work: A qualitative study

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\(^1\) *Worklife of BC Teachers in 2001*. [http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5648](http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5648)


Chapter 6: Sources of work-related stress and changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction
Chapter 7: Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of stress
Chapter 8: Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers, and the perspectives of all teachers
Chapter 9: Teachers’ priority areas for BCTF bargaining and advocacy
Chapter 10: Implications and discussion

Study implementation and response rate

The Research Department of the BC Teachers’ Federation conducted a survey of public school teachers to assess working and learning conditions in BC schools. The Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey collected information from teachers about demographic and employment characteristics, education and professional development, workload issues, summer break, job satisfaction and stress, if and why they were considering leaving the teaching profession, and teachers’ priority areas for BCTF bargaining and advocacy to improve working and learning conditions.

Recruitment method

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2009. Survey participants with a contact e-mail address were informed about the online survey by e-mail (60% of sample) and provided with a link to the survey. The remaining participants were mailed a survey package. Survey participants whose e-mail message was returned as “undeliverable” were sent a survey package by regular mail. A reminder letter about the survey was sent to all survey participants within four weeks of the initial contact.

Selection of the survey sample

As of December 15, 2008, the size of the member population of active teachers eligible for the survey was 38,764 members. A random sample of 2,502 active members of the BC Teachers’ Federation was drawn from the member database. To achieve results that would fall within a five-percent margin of error and 95% confidence intervals for a random sample, 380 responses to the survey were required4.

Response rate

The survey yielded 563 valid responses with completed surveys received from 54 of 60 school districts in BC. Two districts, Arrow Lakes and Stikine, had no teachers selected in the randomly-drawn sample. Four districts (Central Coast, Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte, Prince Rupert, and Gulf Islands), where teachers were randomly selected, had no teachers respond to the survey.

The overall response to the survey was 23% of the 2,502 teachers included in the random sample. Table 1 shows the response for each school district as a percentage of the total survey population and as a percentage of the total sample.

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A comparison of the response rate of each district to the overall response rate for the survey reveals which districts are over-represented or under-represented. In some districts, mostly rural, at least 40% of teachers completed a survey. These include Powell River (58%), Peace River North (40%), Alberni (44%), Nechako Lakes (48%), and Nisga’a (50%). Districts with a response rate well below the sample response rate include Kootenay Lake (12%), Howe Sound (12%), Sooke (12%), Vancouver Island North (10%), Bulkley Valley (8%), Okanagan Similkameen (6%), and Conseil scolaire francophone (4%).

Table 1: Survey sample compared to random sample drawn from the BCTF membership, by school district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Random sample: # of teachers</th>
<th>Random sample: % of the total</th>
<th>Number of survey responses</th>
<th>Survey sample: % of the total</th>
<th>Response rate for each district</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Southeast Kootenay</td>
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<td>Rocky Mountain</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Arrow Lakes</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>Kootenay-Columbia</td>
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<tr>
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The worklife of British Columbia teachers in 2009

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<th>Number of survey responses</th>
<th>Survey sample: % of the total</th>
<th>Response rate for each district</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>0.2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 Vancouver Island North</td>
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<td>93 Conseil scolaire francophone</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>23%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on this study, contact BCTF Research, at researchteam@bctf.ca.
CHAPTER 1:

Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey

Margaret White, MIR
Senior Research Analyst, BCTF Research

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.
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Overview

Demographic characteristics

The survey respondents are similar to British Columbia’s public school teachers in terms of gender and full-time/part-time teaching contract. While teachers in all age and years-of-experience categories are represented in the survey, older, more-experienced teachers are over-represented, while less-experienced, younger teachers are under-represented. This should be considered when interpreting the results.

Teaching characteristics

Survey respondents are well-distributed across grade levels. However, Adult Education teachers make up a very small proportion of the sample. Just under one-half of teachers teach classes with split grades. About one in ten teaches in more than one school or workplace.

About one in ten survey respondents teaches in a program specialty area, mainly in French Immersion/Programme Cadre, Distance Education/Distributed Learning, or Alternative Education. Half of respondents teach students the majority of their subjects while about one-third describe themselves as subject specialists.

About one in five respondents is a learning specialist teacher, with 111 specialist teachers working in a total of 145 full-time equivalent (FTE) assignments. The average FTE assignment for learning specialist teachers is highest for counsellors (0.80) and combined Special Education/Learning Assistance teachers (0.75). About one-third of learning specialist teachers also teach in enrolling positions, with an average enrolling assignment of 0.39 FTE.

About one in five teachers describes the socio-economic environment of the school where they teach as low-income, while 40% teach in mixed-income neighbourhoods. About one in ten teachers describes the environment of their school as high-income.

Employment characteristics

One in every five teachers in the survey works on a part-time basis. Almost all of the part-time teachers in the survey sample are female. Part-time teachers are over-represented in the 35 to 44-year-old age group, and under-represented in the older age groups. Teachers with less than five years’ experience are also more likely to work part-time. About half of part-time teachers do so for personal reasons, while one in five reduced their teaching contract as a strategy to cope with workload. Teachers teaching on call (TTOC) account for 8% of all teachers in the survey, working an average of 29.23 days (of approximately 80 possible work days) over four months.

Leaves and illness

Absenteeism due to illness was quite low among teachers responding to the survey, with most teachers being absent from zero to five days in the school year. About one in eight teachers surveyed was on a paid or unpaid leave at the time of the survey. Teachers on leave were more likely to be female and between 35 to 44 years of age than the overall sample. About half of teachers on leave indicated that workload issues contributed to their decision to take a leave. These teachers were much more likely to be on a leave for an illness/disability that is stress-related or on an unpaid personal leave than teachers for whom workload was not a factor.
Demographic comparison of survey sample to 2008–09 teacher statistics

By gender, age, teaching experience, and type of contract

Charts 1 to 3 show the percentage of teachers in the sample by gender, age, and years of teaching experience for all respondents, and “full-time- and part-time-contract teachers only”, compared to provincial teacher statistics. As provincial data on public school teachers do not include teachers teaching on call (TTOC), provincial comparisons should be made with full-time and part-time teachers only.

The gender composition of the survey sample is similar to the overall population of BC teachers—76.1% of full-time and part-time teachers in the survey sample are female compared to 71.3% public school teachers (FT and PT) in the province (Chart 1).

![Chart 1: Gender—Survey sample vs. province* (2008-09)](chart)

Note: “Sample” percentage includes teachers who work as a TTOC.

While all age groups are represented in the survey, there are some differences at the upper and lower ends of the age continuum (Chart 2). Teachers under 35 years are under-represented, making up only 12.1% of FT and PT teachers in the survey sample, while, for the province, 21% of teachers are in this age group. In contrast, teachers 55 years or older comprise 25.2% of FT and PT teachers in the survey sample, but only 18.4% of BC teachers. Representation in the 35-to-44 and 45-to-54 age groups is comparable between the survey sample and provincial data.

Note: “Sample” percentage includes teachers teaching on call.

Teachers in the survey differ most from BC public school teachers as a whole in years of teaching experience (Chart 3). Only 9% of all teachers in the survey sample and 6% of FT and PT teachers have less than five years teaching experience, compared to 23.4% in the province. In contrast, 43.4% of FT and PT teachers in the survey have 20 or more years teaching experience, compared to 21.6% of teachers in the province. This difference should be considered in interpreting the survey results, especially for questions where teaching experience is relevant.

Note: “Sample” percentage includes teachers teaching on call.

The survey sample of 515 FT and PT teachers is also similar to teachers in the province in terms of full-time and part-time work (Chart 4). 80.6% of teachers in the survey have full-time contract positions, whether continuing or term, compared to three-quarters (74.5%) of BC teachers.

Note: Percentages for the “Sample” based on 515 teachers with full-time or part-time contracts.
Teaching characteristics

Grades taught

Teachers in the survey are well-distributed across grade levels (Chart 5), with the percentage who teach in each grade ranging from 19% of the sample for Kindergarten to 29.7% for Grade 11. However, Adult Education teachers make up only 2.2% of the sample (Chart 6), providing insufficient cases to make valid comparisons.

Chart 5: Grades taught—Percentage of sample who teach in each grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Ed</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 6 shows the percentage of teachers in each grade category for the 544 teachers who answered the question. One-quarter (25.2%) of these teachers teach primary grades (K to 3), 20.4% teach intermediate grades (4 to 7), and 13.6% teach both primary and intermediate grades. Just under one-third of teachers (30.3%) teach secondary grades (8 to 12). A small proportion of teachers (8.3%) teach in both K-to-7 and 8-to-12 grades.

Chart 6: Grades taught, by category (n=544)
Teaching split-grade or multi-grade classes

Of the 563 teachers in the survey, 527 answered the question about split grades (Chart 7). Of these teachers, 53.3% do not teach any split grade classes, 23.7% teach one split-grade class, and 23.0% teach more than one split-grade class.

Number of schools/workplaces

Teachers were also asked to indicate the number of schools/workplaces in which they teach (Chart 8). Of the 555 teachers who answered this question, 88.1% teach in one school or workplace and 11.9% teach in more than one school/workplace.
Type of program or subject specialty (enrolling teachers)

Program specialty
Teachers were asked if they teach in a specialized education program. About one in ten (9.4%) teachers indicates teaching in one of the programs listed. The remainder of the respondents either said it was not applicable (57.7%) or did not answer the question (32.9%).

Of the 53 teachers who indicate teaching in a program (Chart 9), 11.3% teach Adult Education, 22.6% teach Alternative Education, 26.4% teach Distance Education/Distributed Learning, and 39.6% teach French Immersion/Programme Cadre.

Subject specialty
Enrolling teachers were asked to indicate whether they are a subject specialist or not and if so, the type of subject specialty (Chart 10). About half (48.8%) of teachers responding to the survey teach their students the majority of subjects (most elementary teachers, some middle school teachers, some rural teachers). Just over one-third (35.9%) are subject specialists, teaching/working all or most of the time in one subject area.
Type of subject specialty

One in five teachers (19.6%) who is a subject specialist teaches in more than one subject specialty (Chart 11). The most common single subject specialty areas are Music/Drama/Fine Arts (13.6%), Mathematics (12.6%), Science (12.1%), and English/Language Arts (11.6%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Specialty</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music/Drama/Fine Arts</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Language Arts</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French/French Immersion</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/Vocational/Technological Studies</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subject not listed above</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages other than English or French</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and Personal Planning</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Education</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning specialist teachers (LST)

About one in five (19.7%) teachers in the sample is a learning specialist teacher. Of these 111 learning specialist teachers, about half (48.6%) teach in Special Education, Learning Assistance, or a combination of the two. The other half (51.4%) work as specialists in roles such as teacher-librarian, counsellor, Aboriginal Education teacher, or English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher.

The 111 learning specialist teachers in the survey work in a total of 145 FTE specialist assignments. Table 1 shows the average FTE for each of the specialty positions held by the learning specialist teachers. Counsellors (0.80) and combined Special Education and Learning Assistance (0.75), show the highest average FTE of all learning specialists. There are too few Aboriginal Education teachers in the sample to make comparisons.

Forty-one learning specialist teachers (36.9% of LST) said they also teach in an enrolling teaching position. The average FTE for enrolling teaching assignments is 0.39, based on 33 learning specialist teachers who provided data.
Table 1: Average FTE assignment for each type of learning specialty (n=136 assignments)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of learning specialty</th>
<th>Average FTE</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Special Ed and LA</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Librarian</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Education</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education only</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Assistance only</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Chapter 8 of the worklife study, *Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers, and the perspectives of all teachers*, for more about learning specialist teachers.

**Socio-economic context**

The socio-economic context in which a school is located can have many implications for students and teachers. Many studies have documented the impact of socio-economic factors on learning outcomes and graduation rates. The socio-economic context of a neighbourhood can shape the needs of students and families in the school community and the types of resources and programs available to support those needs. Inequities can arise between neighbourhoods when more-affluent areas are able to generate additional sources of school revenues through parent fund-raising efforts and/or district initiatives such as international student programs. All of these factors influence the learning conditions of students and the working conditions of teachers.

The survey asked teachers about the socio-economic environment in which their school/workplace is located. Chart 12 shows that about one in five teachers (22.6% of the sample) teach in a low-income neighbourhood, while only 8.5% teach in high-income areas. Less than one-third of teachers (29.6%) describe the socio-economic environment of their school as middle income, while about 40% of teachers teach in schools located in mixed-income neighbourhoods.

---

Type of employment contract

The majority of teachers responding to the survey (73.8%) held a full-time teaching contract (Chart 13). This is similar to the proportion of full-time teachers in BC public schools. Another 17.8% of teachers worked on a part-time contract only. Almost all full-time and part-time teachers in the survey worked on a continuing contract at the time of the survey.

Teachers teaching on call (TTOC) account for 8% of all teachers in the survey, with 6.2% of the sample working as a TTOC only and another 1.8% working both as a TTOC and on a part-time contract.

Teachers teaching on call (TTOC)

Teachers teaching on call (TTOC) were asked to approximate the number of days they worked between September and December of 2008. The 40 TTOC who answered the question worked an average of 29.23 days over the four months, or approximately 36.5% of the possible days that could be worked in that time period. The range in number of TTOC days worked spanned from 0 to 75 days.

The data in Chart 14 show that 40% of TTOC worked 0 to 20 days over the four-month period, and another third (32.5%) of TTOC worked 21 to 40 days.
Part-time teaching employment

One in five (19.4%) teachers with a temporary or continuing contract position works part-time. A slightly smaller proportion of all respondents (17.5%) work part-time. Part-time teachers in the survey work an average of 0.64 FTE, or just over three days per week. About 1 in 10 part-time teachers (11%) say their school district had reduced their part-time FTE assignment since the previous school year (2007–08).

About one-third of part-time teachers indicate 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 per week. Part-time teachers work an average of 31.4 hours per week in total, ranging from 5 to 60 hours per week.

Part-time teachers were asked to indicate which statement best relates to their reason for working part-time (Chart 15). Just over half (56.6%) of part-time teachers say they prefer to work part-time for personal reasons. One in five part-time teachers (20.2%) says they choose to work part-time as a strategy to cope with workload. Some part-time work was involuntary—11.1% of part-time teachers say they would prefer full-time employment, or more hours than they currently teach. About 1 in 10 part-time teachers teaches on this basis for health reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Working Part-Time</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to work part-time for personal reasons</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I chose to reduce my contract as a strategy to cope with workload</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer full-time, or more hours than I currently teach</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work part-time because I am in a job accommodation or rehabilitation program</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work part-time because of illness/disability, but I am not in a rehabilitation program</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of part-time and full-time teachers

This section compares the demographic characteristics of part-time and full-time teachers. The sample includes the 515 teachers in a part-time or full-time position (continuing or term). TTOC are excluded from this analysis. Sample percentages may differ slightly due to missing values for one of the variables included in the comparisons.

Gender

Almost all (92.9%) of the part-time teachers in this survey are female (Chart 16), which is significantly different from the gender distribution of all PT and FT teachers in the survey sample. The proportion of female (71.9%) and male (28.1%) full-time teachers more closely resembles the gender breakdown for all FT and PT teachers (75.9% and 24.1%, respectively).

Chart 16: Full-time and part-time positions by gender, compared to sample (n=507/515)
Comparison by gender, age, teaching experience, and grades taught

Table 2 shows the percentage of part-time and full-time teachers by gender, age, teaching experience, and grades taught. A comparison of the percentage breakdowns for each of these groups to the percentage of part-time and full-time teachers in the sample reveals some differences, especially for gender, age, and experience.

Almost all male teachers work on full-time contracts (94.3%), considerably higher than the 80.6% for all full- and part-time teachers in the survey sample.

Teachers aged 35 to 44 hold a disproportionate share of part-time positions: about one-third (31.1%) of teachers aged 35 to 44 years work part-time, compared to one in five (19.4%) FT and PT teachers in the survey sample. Only 12.2% of teachers 55 years and older do so.

New teachers are more likely to work part-time. Whereas 19.4% of FT and PT teachers in the survey sample hold part-time contracts, 32% of teachers with less than five years experience work part-time. Only 10.5% of part-time teachers have 25 or more years of teaching experience.

Table 2: Percentage of part-time and full-time teachers by gender, age, teaching experience, and grades taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (n=507)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (n=508)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience (n=507)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or more years</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades taught (n=489)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K to 7 and 8 to 12</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample—FT &amp; PT (n=515)</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leaves and illness

Time off due to illness or disability

The survey asked all teachers to indicate how many days or months they were absent in the current school year because of illness or disability. Chart 17 shows that most teachers were absent for only short periods of time. One in six teachers (17%) did not have any absences, while 54.8% were away for one to five days due to illness or disability. Very few teachers (5.3%) were absent for a month or more due to illness or disability.

Note: One month is 20 to 22 working days.
Teachers on leave and contributing factors

The survey asked teachers whether they were on a leave, and if so the type of leave, and if workload issues had contributed to their decision to take a leave. About one in eight teachers (12.4%) surveyed was on a paid or unpaid leave at the time they completed the survey. A higher percentage of teachers on leave were female compared to the survey sample (89.9% vs. 76.5%).

Compared to the overall sample, a higher percentage of teachers on leave had 5 to 14 years’ teaching experience (49.3% vs. 32.3%) (Chart 18) and were 35 to 44 years of age (39.7% vs. 28.8%) (Chart 19). About the same proportion of teachers on leave taught elementary or secondary grades as in the overall sample.
Type of leave

Chart 20 illustrates that the most prevalent types of leave for surveyed teachers are maternity/parenthood/adoption (29.4%); illness-disability, stress-related (25%); unpaid personal leave (19.1%); and illness/disability, not directly stress-related (16.2%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of leave</th>
<th>Yes—Workload issues contributed to my decision to take a leave (%)</th>
<th>No—Workload issues did not contribute to my decision to take a leave (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternity/parenthood/adoption</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness/disability, stress-related</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid personal leave</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness/disability, not directly stress-related</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondment or other employment</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: Of the 70 teachers on leave, 66 responded to the question about workload.

Were workload issues a factor?

The survey asked teachers on leave whether workload issues contributed to their decision to take a leave. Of the 70 teachers on leave, 66 responded to the question. Half of these teachers said that workload contributed to their decision to take a leave. Table 3 shows the type of leave these teachers were on and how they responded to the question about workload. Of those teachers who said workload contributed to their decision to take a leave, 51.5% were on a stress-related illness/disability, 27.3% were on an unpaid personal leave, 15.2% were on leave for illness/disability, not directly stress-related, and 6.1% were on a parental-related leave.

Table 3: Did workload issues contribute to your decision to take a leave?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of leave</th>
<th>Yes—Workload issues contributed to my decision to take a leave (%)</th>
<th>No—Workload issues did not contribute to my decision to take a leave (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondment or other employment</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid personal leave</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity/parenthood/adoption</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness/disability, not directly stress-related</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness/disability, stress-related</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers’ education and professional development: Experiences and perspectives

Charlie Naylor, Ph.D.
Senior Researcher, BCTF Research

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.
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Introduction

Teacher learning is a complex process that cannot be addressed solely by the traditional approaches of conferences with the latest “guru” and PD days made up of a series of workshops. Nor can it be addressed by mandating professional learning community groups and their tasks within a school. Instead, a rich mix of individualized and ongoing learning activities needs to be fostered. (Clark et al., 2007, p. 20)

The **Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey** asked respondents about their education and professional development (PD) in three areas: formal education in universities, both completed and current, participation in and perceptions of professional development, and interest in participating in mentorship, either as mentor or mentee.

For ease of reading, some numbers have been rounded-off.

Teachers’ education

**Education**

Slightly over 50% of respondents (Chart 1) report completing levels of education beyond the bachelor’s degree plus teacher training that are required for certification in British Columbia: 26% had completed a university certificate/diploma, 25% had earned a master’s degree, and 1% had a doctoral degree. If samples from this and a comparable survey are broadly representative, then it appears that proportionately more public-school teachers in BC have completed certificate or graduate programs than teachers in most other provinces—a pan-Canadian survey by Kamanzi, Riopel, and Lessard (2007) reported that 43% of its respondents had education beyond bachelor level, compared to the 52% of respondents in this survey.

![Chart 1: Highest level of education completed (n=561)](chart1.png)
87% of respondents were not currently enrolled in education programs (Chart 2), and the 7.6% who were enrolled in either certificate or master’s programs were almost equally divided between the two areas, with an additional 0.5% enrolled in doctoral programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No, not currently enrolled in an education program</th>
<th>University certificate or diploma above bachelor level</th>
<th>Master’s degree</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84% of respondents did not intend to enrol in such programs in either 2009 or 2010 (Chart 3). The three most common reasons were that respondents had already reached their desired level of post-secondary education, they were simply not interested right now, or they had family or financial constraints (Chart 4). A number of respondents indicated that they had difficulty accessing programs, while others stated that they were nearing retirement and therefore additional educational programs were not of interest to them.

The data may provide a sense that few teachers are participating in or interested in pursuing education beyond the minimum required to teach. However, as noted above, over 50% of respondents have already completed graduate or Category 5+1 courses. Another aspect to this may be that the survey respondents reflect a somewhat older sample than is representative of BC teachers, so the survey results may reflect a demographic segment of teachers in which more have either already completed post-graduate programs or be nearing retirement, when compared to the BC teaching population as a whole.

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1 See Teacher Qualification Service, TQS Categories, [http://www.tqs.bc.ca/categories.html](http://www.tqs.bc.ca/categories.html).
2 See Chapter 1, Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey.
However, almost two-thirds of respondents were not planning to enrol in an education program, due to barriers such as financial restraints (27%), family obligations (27%), access to programs (6%), and workload issues (3%) (Chart 4).

![Chart 4: Reasons respondents not enrolling in an education program (n=473)](chart)

**Gender differences related to non-enrolment in education programs**

Analysis of the data by gender shows that there appear to be significant differences to some responses regarding non-enrolment in an education program. In terms of having reached the desired level of education, or current non-interest, responses show no gender differences. However, in most other areas differences do emerge, with proportionately more women consistently stating they were not enrolled because of family obligations (84% of those identifying this as a reason were women), and financial restraints (81%). In terms of those stating that health issues and workload were reasons, all the respondents who provided these reasons were women.

These data indicate an issue that requires further research to determine whether female teachers face barriers to accessing education programs which may be linked to family and finance. Recent research on stress in society and among teachers (Naylor and Vint, 2009; Naylor, 2008) identifies higher levels of stress reported by women than men both in Canada and internationally. In addition, a proportionately higher level of stress-related BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan claims are made by female teachers than their male colleagues. While such evidence suggests that gender differences could be significant, the issue requires a much deeper examination than can be offered here.
Participation in and perspectives on professional development

Participation

“PD is and should continue to be of paramount importance. It is through PD over the years which has changed, influenced and improved my teaching practice. This is a time for colleagues to share knowledge, talk, learn new ideas and implement into classrooms. Variety of delivery is key to appeal to as many teachers as possible. Some will never participate, some will be sick, but the vast majority benefit. PD is time well spent. Planning is imperative. We need to reinforce the concept that the more you interact with a learning community the easier your job, the more support you receive, the better you become.” (survey respondent)

School-based (85%), district-based (80%), and self-directed (68%) professional development are the most common forms of PD undertaken, with participation in Provincial Specialist Association (PSA) days much lower at 32% of respondents (Chart 5). However, it is likely that many PSA PD events are less geographically-accessible to many teachers compared to school- or district-based PD.

These data suggest that respondents participate in several forms of PD during a typical school year, mixing and matching according to preference and availability.

![Chart 5: Participation in professional development, by type](image-url)
Perspectives

Respondents are generally, but not uniformly, positive about both school-based and district-sponsored PD, with district PD days rating slightly higher than school-based PD activities. Almost three-quarters of respondents want more PD options, which suggests that many teachers still consider PD as consumers, preferring to choose options rather than create them. There appear to be conflicting data concerning teacher autonomy in professional development. While less than 14% report limited autonomy in choosing PD, 32% state that they experience some direction towards particular sessions. This suggests some encroachment in terms of autonomy rather than a major diminution of it.

When respondents were asked to add their comments on current PD approaches, contrasting perceptions were expressed. Some teachers report satisfaction, while others report an admin-directed approach to PD which they feel does not respect individual teacher needs or autonomy. Two such contrasting views are shared here:

“School-based PD has been very successful at our school. It provides opportunity to develop and improve on common goals through the primary and into the intermediate grades.”

“Professional development when teacher-driven provides a valuable learning and teaching opportunity to share information with colleagues. For the past six years the professional development of our school has been directed by the administration and driven primarily by school goals, not individual need or interest.”

Chart 6 depicts respondents’ generally-positive perspectives on professional-development options and experiences. They report high levels of autonomy and enjoyment of both school- and district-based PD. Yet, in apparent contrast, respondents indicate that they want to see expanded options available to them—an area explored in the following analysis of qualitative data.
In terms of respondents’ comments on PD options and issues, several themes emerge from analysis of the qualitative data:

1. **A significant number of respondents have specific ideas on changes they’d like to see, mainly in terms of:**

   a. **A preference for more opportunities to observe and collaborate**

   A number of teachers state that they had participated in self-directed observation with other teachers and would like more opportunities to observe and collaborate with peers:
   
   “I appreciated having a couple of self-directed days; it allowed me to go and observe other teachers. The best way to learn!”
   
   “I am most stimulated and inspired by PD that allows me to work with other teachers and gives us the autonomy to discuss topics relevant to our classrooms and situations rather than prescribed topics of conversation.”
   
   The overall impression from the data is that while in some cases teachers are able to use PD time to observe and/or collaborate with peers, in others there exists a level of external control that limits teacher autonomy, choice, and access to self-directed, autonomous professional development focused on peer observation, discourse, and collaboration.

   b. **A need for more funding and time to make PD accessible**

   Many respondents are clearly dissatisfied with the level of funding (for workshop fees, travel, childcare, teacher-teaching-on-call (TTOC) coverage, etc.) and the amount of time available for professional development. Sometimes the combination of the lack of funding, limited time, and geography (location) either limits opportunities, or makes them inaccessible to teachers:
   
   “I am often unable to attend PD opportunities...that are offered after school/evenings, due to our distance from town (located 1½ hours from town); I would never make it in time. Also, there is limited school funding available to compensate for travel/registration costs.”
   
   “I find that our district does not provide enough funding to cover the costs of most PD activities that aren’t hosted by our own district. In the future I would like to see more districts having the same PD days so that teachers can go to something offered by a different district and not have to pay TTOC costs.”
   
   While many respondents express dissatisfaction, many also state that similar issues of low levels of funding and limited time actually block them from participating in professional development. Lack of funding extends to limited capacity to pay for TTOC coverage while accessing PD. For many teachers living outside of the Lower Mainland metropolitan area, the concentration of opportunities on the south coast adds to the perception of limited access:
   
   “As a high-school teacher in a specialized area, I find district and school PD as often lacking relevance. Being outside of Vancouver, the cost of pursuing individual PD is somewhat prohibitive, as are the time constraints.”
   
   “Often there is very little of interest for senior math teachers in the [Fraser] Valley. The cost for travel to the coast for provincial conferences is too much. Driving…to Vancouver in October and February is often difficult, too much snow.”
Models of PD funding vary across the province. The Delta Teachers’ Association’s *Professional Development News* (May 2008) stated that its members could apply for PD funds up to $500, and, for teachers who had been DTA members for a period of four years or more, $1,500 could be accessed from a fund for attending national or international conferences, presumably for a limited number of applicants. In other districts and locals, PD funds are shared equally among teachers, usually resulting in a very low allocation of approximately $120 for each teacher.

Whatever the approach, many respondents are dissatisfied with low levels of funding for professional development.

c. **A greater focus on and access to self-directed PD**

Some respondents state a preference for self-directed PD:

“I have chosen to use a self-directed approach to PD. It is nice to have flexibility and options.”

Others suggest that some school districts are skeptical about its utility:

“I feel too much emphasis is placed on attending yet another workshop with not enough time given to teachers to work towards familiarizing themselves with ways to implement new ideas in the classroom. Self-directed PD is often considered as doing your own thing and not really as professional development. I would like to see more opportunity for self directed PD.”

The preference for self-directed PD largely appears as a reaction to what many respondents see as PD with limited relevance or PD with high levels of Administrative Officer (AO) or district influence. Thus the opportunity to focus on topics of interest, often with other teachers, rather than attend a packaged workshop, appears to attract a number of respondents:

“I have sat through many speakers with a primary or elementary focus and found that most of what they were teaching didn’t apply to Kindergarten. For that reason I try to choose PD activities with a K/1 focus so more of what I learn is relevant. I tend to do more self-directed lately and get together with K teachers from other schools to gain new insights.”

“Best PD sessions are put on by practicing teachers who understand the nuances of the job.”

Some respondents state a preference for forms of collaboration and learning communities:

“Finally, our district is heading towards self-directed PD and teacher collaboration. On February 27, 2009, I had one of the best PD days collaborating with teachers in my district.”

“The way of the future is in-school or in-area professional learning groups that can do inquiry-based learning on a topic of mutual interest. Now that is exciting and relevant PD.”

As outlined in Chapter 3, almost one-half of teachers (44%) are involved in a professional learning community or other forms of collaboration outside of the regular workday, spending an average of 1.5 hours per week on this activity. There are no differences between elementary and secondary teachers relating to participation in this activity.
For many, the ideal PD includes combinations—some things from which to choose, others self-directed; but whatever the preference, funding is usually an issue, limiting choice and access to PD:

“I like participating in a variety of PD activities throughout the school year. I like the choices of school-based, district-based, PSA day, and self-directed PD days. I would like the opportunity to attend out-of-province conferences but the cost is prohibitive.”

“I think single-day PD is of limited usefulness. I would like to see more accessible (i.e., in my area or online, and free or cheap) PD that is meaningful and ongoing (something like Teacher Inquiry projects that I have heard about).”

There is a growing literature which argues for a shift in terminology from “professional development” to “professional learning,” a discussion promoted in part in the Ontario Teachers’ Federation’s Beyond PD Days (2007). This distinction, which was not solicited in the survey, also does not appear in the large bank of qualitative data responses to this survey. While this may suggest that most BC teachers still view PD in a somewhat traditional way, there are some data which show that some teachers appear to be increasingly interested in self-directed PD, reflecting a potential shift away from accessing available PD towards building approaches to professional learning that engage teachers and are created, rather than consumed, by teachers.

2. Influences on PD from district- and school-based administration are significant, eliciting some positive respondent views, but a greater number of concerns

While many respondents are positive about both school- and district-based PD, there are many expressions of concern about the pressures on teachers as both district management and school administrators try to influence teachers’ choice of professional development:

“Professional development should help me teach in my classroom, not help administrators manage the school.”

“The district tries to steer PD via the Administrative Officers. There’s often a new buzzword or theme they want us to explore. Teachers must be forceful in order to have any autonomy at all. This is hard for beginning teachers or teachers on temporary contracts. They feel they must go with the flow the admin is steering us towards. I’d prefer the admin do their own thing and let us do our thing.”

“At present our school’s PD direction is driven by School Goal Plan and a decidedly narrow view of literacy by current admin. This approach definitely detracts from…PD days of collaboration/sharing and reflecting about where we are at, where we are going, and how we can support each other to get there.”

Thus, some tensions about who controls or influences PD are stated, but the tensions are not common. As with the quantitative data, respondents seem to be stating that there are some pressures but in most cases they are able to exercise autonomy.

3. Both positive and negative perspectives on PD are stated

“All PD is great! Appreciate autonomy in choosing my PD. Would like more opportunity to collaborate with my departments.”

“Professional development days are a waste of time, talent, and resources. Any business organization that used the BC-teacher model for staff professional
development would realize the process is fatally flawed. The sessions do nothing to improve teacher effectiveness.”

These comments reflect two contrasting points on a continuum regarding perceptions of PD, with one very supportive and the other highly critical. The first statement reflects the perspective of a teacher actively choosing PD and using her or his autonomy to do so; the second comment appears to reflect a “consumer” attitude to PD, in which the teacher views the available approaches and options negatively while not appearing to exercise autonomy in engaging in some form of preferred PD.

The vast majority of respondents are more positive than negative concerning PD, and most recognize the need for PD to be a part of teachers’ professional lives.

4. **Professional development opportunities offered by the BCTF are rarely mentioned, and then not always favourably**

“My least favourite PD presentations have been those put out by the BCTF. They all seem to follow the same tired recipe approach, and rarely does the presenter seem to be an ‘expert’ in the field.”

It may be of some concern that few respondents mention the BCTF as a source of professional development, and of those who do, some are critical of the BCTF’s content and approach.

5. **PD preferences differ depending on career stage**

“I am interested in round table discussions of the big ideas: philosophy, poverty, attachment issues, etc. I am at the point in my career where I don’t need any more strategies or material; I need stimulating, intellectual, meaningful conversations.”

“So much of PD becomes redundant for teachers who have been working for more than five years. It would be nice to have PDs geared for different seniorities for different specialities. Also, based on my experiences with illness these past few years, [PD on] proactive health and wellness strategies, in the entire health spectrum, seems prudent for the majority of teachers and non-teaching staff.”

The literature on professional development suggests that teachers at different stages in their careers prefer different approaches to professional development. In this literature, teachers new to the profession want “how to teach” sessions, with resources and strategies to apply in their classrooms. More-experienced teachers prefer a reflective, conversational approach which allows for an exchange of ideas with peers. Simons (1999) articulated two kinds of impact of professional development on teachers: “near” and “far” transfer. “Near” transfer involves a close relationship between the professional development experience and the application of whatever has been the focus of the professional development session. Many new and inexperienced teachers find the greatest utility in approaches that can be directly and immediately utilized in the classroom—a new curriculum unit, an adapted material, a lesson plan. The notion of “far” transfer implies a greater distance between the professional development experience and any application. “Far” transfer may be of greater utility to experienced teachers who do not need lesson plans or curriculum units but who may wish to discuss or reflect on more general issues—teaching styles, groups of learners facing difficulties with current approaches, the nature of collaboration with peers. “Near” transfer supports dealing with immediate difficulties, while “far” transfer is linked to greater professional growth, and is therefore of more utility over a teacher’s career than the short-term need for “something that works with my class tomorrow.”
Mentoring

Almost two-thirds of respondents indicate that they would like to participate in mentoring, as either mentors or mentees (Chart 7). The proportion of newer teachers who would like to receive mentoring is high. Although only 15% of all survey respondents were aged under 35, 11% of respondents (almost three-quarters of all respondents aged under 35) indicate that as newer teachers they would like to receive mentoring. This suggests a very high level of interest in mentoring, an interest currently unfulfilled. There are few mentoring programs accessible to teachers in BC, and no provincial mentoring and induction programs, such as the ones developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education. With BC lagging far behind provinces such as Ontario in terms of teachers’ mentoring opportunities, these data provide some sense of both the demand for mentoring and a potentially rich source of mentors from teachers who clearly want to offer support to newer teachers.

Discussion

Data from this survey illustrate that many teachers engage in considerable formal education beyond the minimum required for certification. Yet there are indications that for some, barriers of cost, family responsibilities, workload, and access still exist, limiting their ability to access certificate and graduate university courses. These barriers appear to disproportionately disadvantage female teachers.

In terms of professional development, a majority of teachers enjoy school-based and district-based PD, and exercise considerable autonomy in terms of choice and participation. A smaller number of teachers express concern about administrator/district control. Most teachers who responded to this survey appear to be frustrated by severe financial limitations which reduce their access to many types of professional development, though no respondents suggest that this low level of funding should be considered a priority in the next round of bargaining. In terms of

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4 See Chapter 1, Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey.
5 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/induction.html
mentoring, the data suggest both strong demand from newer teachers, and a willingness to offer mentoring on the part of experienced teachers. This bodes well should mentoring be provided across the province. Sadly, there appears little evidence that such provision is likely in the near future, as there is no information from the BC Ministry of Education to indicate any upcoming mentoring/induction support at a provincial level.

The overall sense from these data is that while some teachers are opting for self-directed professional development, the majority still appears to consider professional development opportunities from the perspective of a consumer, choosing options that are offered rather than creating options with peers. A possible direction for the BCTF may be to further explore ways to increase autonomy through self-directed PD by expanding and documenting initiatives and approaches such as teacher inquiry, collaborations, and professional conversation approaches. Some of these approaches have been developed by the BCTF in recent years with the expansion of the Program for Quality Teaching Inquiry projects.6

One area noticeably not addressed by respondents in relation to professional development is technology. While many state that geography and access are problems, none mention technology as either a utilized or possible solution. Only one respondent makes any mention of technology connected to considerations of PD. Inquiry regarding the use of technology linked to PD could be an additional focus for future surveys.

It is clear from analysis of the qualitative data that many teachers are actively engaged in professional development, and that the vast majority consider PD to be essential to their work as teachers. A recent analysis of teachers’ professional development (Webster-Wright, 2009) offers some similarities to these survey data in terms of findings, and a message of hope and optimism in terms of future directions:

Much of the research reported here reveals most professionals as enthusiastic learners who want to improve their practice. Let us listen to their experience and work to support, not hinder, their learning. Rather than deny, seek to control, or standardize the complexity of professional learning experiences, let us accept, celebrate, and develop insights from these experiences to support professionals as they continue to learn. (p. 728)

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References


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.
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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 steadily\(^1\), while the number of specialist teachers available to support these students has declined\(^2\). 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 19 hours</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 29 hours</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 39 hours</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 49 hours</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 59 hours</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or more hours</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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-time (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.
Chapter 3: Workload issues for BC teachers

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

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

* 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**

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

* 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).

![Chart 2: Percentage of teachers who work on school-related work outside of classroom hours (n=563)](chart2.png)
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

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

* 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

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

* 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

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

* 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**

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

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.

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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 layoffs, 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 FL 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 BCeSIS**

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours spent preparing report cards (n=555/563)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 hours</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+ hours</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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).

Chart 15: Change in time spent on report cards since using BCeSIS (n=128/131)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Stayed the Same</th>
<th>Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
Chapter 3: Workload issues for BC teachers

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 composition.

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 profession.

MW:afay:tfu

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.
CHAPTER 4:

How teachers spent their summer break

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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.
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Chapter 4: How teachers spent their summer break

Introduction

This section of the study examines how much time teachers took as a break during the summer of 2008, and what types of activities they spent time on during the summer break, including various types of professional upgrading, completing year-end tasks, preparing for the upcoming school year, working in paid employment, and volunteer activities. Teachers involved in these tasks also indicated the amount of time they spent on each task.

Teachers made extensive comments about how they spent their time during the summer break in the space provided on the questionnaire. This report presents a descriptive analysis of these comments, integrating the themes and illustrative quotes into the relevant sections of the paper.

Taking time off during the summer break

Of the 563 teachers who completed the survey, 412 teachers provided information on how much time they spent taking a break (e.g., vacation or time off) during the 2008 summer break. On average, these teachers took 5.7 weeks off during the break between June 30 and September 2, 2008. Only five teachers (1% of respondents) took no break during the summer months (Table 1). Chart 1 shows that about one-third of teachers took a break for seven or more weeks and one in five teachers took a break for three or fewer weeks during the 2008 summer break.

Table 1: Number of weeks teachers spent “taking a break,” by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>% Female teachers</th>
<th>% Male teachers</th>
<th>% all respondents (n=408)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 weeks</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 weeks</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 weeks</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 weeks</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Variations by gender, age, and teaching experience

Gender
Overall, gender does not appear to make a difference in determining the amount of time teachers took as a break during the summer of 2008 (Table 2).

Age
Age does make a difference, especially at the ends of the age continuum. About one-third (35%) of teachers under 35 years took a break for zero to three weeks compared to 13% of teachers 55 years or older. The percentage of teachers taking seven or more weeks off during the summer increased steadily with age, from 26% for teachers under 35 years to 47% for teachers 55 years or older (Table 2).

Years of teaching experience
The difference in the amount of time teachers took as a break during the summer of 2008 is even more pronounced by years of teaching experience. Table 2 shows that only 6% of teachers with less than five years’ teaching experience took seven or more weeks’ break compared to 50% of teachers with over 25 years’ experience. In contrast, 63% of teachers with less than five years’ experience took a break for 0 to 3 weeks, while 13% of teachers with 25 or more years of experience did so.

Table 2 also shows that as teaching experience increases, the proportion of teachers taking a break for 0 to 3 weeks during the summer steadily decreases for the first 15 years of teaching. About two-thirds (63%) of teachers with less than five years’ experience took a break of 0 to 3 weeks, decreasing to 9% of teachers with 10 to 14 years’ teaching experience.

Table 2: Number of weeks spent “taking a break” during the 2008 summer break

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number of weeks taking a break</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents (n=412)</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What teachers say…

Recovering from the demands of the school year

Analysis of respondents’ comments reveals that teachers spent part of the summer recovering from a hectic school year and attending to their personal and family needs. Several of the comments reflected the exhaustion some teachers feel at the start of summer break, and the need for time to recuperate. For some teachers, it took up to two weeks to catch up on sleep and recover their energy:

“Completing the reports for year-end files always goes into the summer. Then there is the sleep factor, trying to catch up from lack of sleep over the year takes two weeks at least. After that it feels like I am ready to have a holiday.”

“By the end of June, I am beat. It takes at least the first two weeks to feel human and relaxed again.”

But some teachers needed much more time and seemed under greater stress:

“I was sick for a big part of the summer, so it was difficult to do my normal amount of anything. It took a long time to recover from my difficult class.”

“I have to take a break during the summer because I am exhausted. It takes the month of July to recuperate and then it’s almost time to start preparing for the next year.”

“I’m usually so exhausted in July that it’s hard for me to relax. It’s difficult to transition from high structure to no structure. I often have a dip in mood until I adapt.”

“I used to start planning September by the time August 1 came around. Now, I feel only stress that September is closing in. It has gotten to the point where I hate the stress of June so much I usually get sick the first week of July.”

Several teachers expressed the view that it was important for teachers to take the summer break off:

“I believe in the word ‘break’. I do not go near the school until one day before the year begins. In the past I have taken educational courses but I’m done now.”

“I feel quite strongly that the summer should be a full and complete break from work. During the year, I am completely submerged; I do very little outside of work activities. The summer is when I live the other part of my life!”

A few teachers nearing retirement voiced their thoughts on taking time off during the summer break:

“I am close to retirement so I no longer teach summer school and take courses during the summer. In the past I have only had about two weeks’ break in the summer. Time to take it easy.”

“As an experienced teacher, I’ve given up enough summers to my profession. I’ve marked provincial exams, gone on PD, taught summer school, and prepped for new courses. Since I intend to retire in five years, and have become quite tired, I’ve decided to take the time I need to regenerate.”
Restoring work/life balance

Many of the teachers’ comments reveal that much of the time they take off in the summer is spent restoring work/life balance and taking care of family responsibilities. Teachers spent time “catching up” on the many personal and family needs that were put on hold during the school year:

“I try to maximize my personal time in the summer and crazily try to catch up on all the things that need to be done for my home/yard/family that I don’t have time for during the school year.”

“Summer is for catching up on my life. All the personal stuff there is no time for during the school year.”

“Taking a break includes looking after my family’s needs, medical, dental, eye appointments that we don’t have time to do during the school year.”

“Does this mean relaxation time? Much of my summer is used to get things in order at home which get put on the back burner during the school year.”

The comments also indicate that some teachers spent the summer break in a care-giving role, whether that is for children, grandchildren, or elderly parents:

“Caregiver for my mother while my caregiver takes holidays.”

“I have three young children and my husband works full-time. My ‘taking a break’ is being a full-time, active, involved, educated parent!!”

“I often volunteer working with children in summer programs but due to personal situation (separation, child care of grandchildren, etc.) spent little time in educational endeavours.”

“A family illness last summer resulted in me having no real break.”

Some teachers described the things they did to address work/life balance and improve their sense of well-being:

“I definitely need the time off to relax, travel, garden, see friends again, etc. I am always on the look-out for ideas/planning in my head, though.”

“I enjoy my summers much more now that I have children. I used to spend much more time preparing.”
Chapter 4: How teachers spent their summer break

School-related or employment activities teachers spent time on during the summer break

Another aspect of teacher workload is the amount of time teachers spend on teaching-related activities or other employment during the summer break. The survey asked teachers, “During last summer break (2008), how much time did you spend on the following activities?”

Chart 2 shows that the activities the most teachers indicated spending time on were preparing for the upcoming school year (77.8%), completing year-end tasks (59.5%), and reading education journals and/or books (44.3%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the upcoming school year</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing year-end tasks</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading education journals and/or books</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking District PD</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking educational courses</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other work or work-related activities</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment not related to teaching</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education-related employment other than teaching summer school</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching summer school</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows the average weeks worked on each activity and the number of teachers doing each activity. Of these activities, working in paid employment involved the most time during the summer break. Teachers who worked in paid employment during the summer spent an average of 4.2 weeks teaching summer school, 3.8 weeks in non-teaching employment, and/or 2.9 weeks in other education-related employment.

### Table 3: Average weeks* spent on each activity during the summer break (highest to lowest)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity – Summer break</th>
<th>Average weeks worked</th>
<th>Number of teachers who indicated engaging in the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching summer school</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment not related to teaching</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other education-related employment</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking educational courses</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other work or work-related activities</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading education journals/books</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep for the upcoming school year</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing year-end tasks</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking PD</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 week = 5 working days

### Time spent in the summer completing year-end tasks and preparing for the next school year

#### Completing year-end tasks

The vast majority of the 335 teachers who spent time during their summer break completing year-end tasks did so within a two-week period. About two-thirds (62.7%) spent less than one week on this task.
What teachers say…

Many teachers spent time before the start of the school year setting up classrooms:

“Cleaning and reorganizing classroom before the new school year consumes a lot of time; renovations to ceiling left classroom in disarray.”

In addition to the usual end-of-year tasks, teachers who were changing grades, schools, or course assignments had the additional job of cleaning out the classroom. For some, this took a considerable amount of effort and time:

“I had to change schools because of a change in programs. After 19 years at the old school I had a lot of materials. It has taken me most of summer 2007 and half of 2008 summer to downsize to fit in my new classroom.”

“Dismantling the classroom for summer clean-up and reassembling the room takes a lot of time and work.”

The following example illustrates the additional stress experienced by teachers when their workload increased significantly due to changing schools or grades taught:

“Every year since 2000 I get laid off and placed in a new school, grade, job. It is a ton of work to pack up, move, unpack, and prepare for a totally new grade. Plus get to know new parents, students, staff, and admin every year; very exhausting.”

Preparation for the upcoming school year

As Chart 2 (p. 5) indicates, most teachers (78%) spent time during the summer break preparing for the upcoming school year. Of those 438 teachers who did so, 29.2% spent less than one week, and 63.5% spent one to two weeks preparing for the next school year (Chart 4).
What teachers say…

Teachers had a lot to say about the time they spent in the summer months preparing for the upcoming school year. The comments indicate that some teachers spent considerable time during the summer break preparing for new courses:

“I spent two intensive weeks preparing a secondary French program from scratch.”

“I taught international students English for our district. I changed from intermediate to primary and had to prep for new grades.”

“If I know that I am teaching a new course for the upcoming year, I review the entire course program over the summer break. I may spend two to three weeks to prepare unit plans.”

Specialty programs may also require teachers to do extra preparation in the summer break:

“Much of the summer break is spent on preparing for the following year…and with IB [International Baccalaureate], there is also marking that sometimes needs to be completed.”

“Specialty-course teachers spend a lot of time sourcing and ordering supplies for September during the summer.”

One teacher’s comment suggests that the lack of textbooks, resulting from funding inadequacies, may be increasing the amount of time teachers spend preparing curriculum materials:

“I have reached the point of resenting spending about half my summer on school-related issues. Part of the prep time is spent setting up assignments/projects to help cover the course requirements due to a lack of textbooks. I do not have enough textbooks for each child to have a Science or reading book. I am using antiquated Socials texts so each child has a book.”

Many teachers indicated spending time at the end of August preparing for the upcoming school year on such activities as preparing lesson plans, planning field trips, and conducting interviews with parents of Kindergarten students:

“The last week of August in the school during day hours prepping lesson plans, activities for my teaching team, setting up intro activities, prepping course previews and overviews, timetabling, etc.”

“I chose to do parent-child interviews (including screening/observation of child) before school begins in the fall. The information is very useful and the interview experience gives the child an opportunity to meet me and view his/her classroom before the big step of entering Kindergarten.”

Last-minute changes to course or grade assignments makes it hard to prepare

The following quotes illustrate the frustration some teachers experience due to the instability of teaching assignments for the next school year, with last-minute changes in grades or courses making it difficult to prepare curriculum over the summer break:

“Yes, I spend time collecting my materials together, and yes, I spend a lot of time trying to figure out next year. Although, at our school, grades assigned can change, making all that hard work down the tubes.”
“As a counsellor, we come one week early to do programming. We must also prepare for whichever teaching block we are given, little choice. We must take whatever is left over, requiring substantial prep for courses we’ve never taught before.”

Some teachers stopped preparing curriculum during the summer break due to the frustration of having done so in the past, only to have their grade assignments changed in September:

“I try to avoid preparing for the next year because it is my experience that job assignments can and do change even in September. I have spent time and money preparing to teach certain subjects when the curriculum has changed only to have the grade level change. Thousands of dollars are spent subsidizing the education system and that money is not even tax deductible.

“I have refused to work without pay. In the past I’ve spent one to two weeks in August prepping only to have my grade changed. They get enough of my own time during the year with extra-curricular meetings.”

Several teachers without permanent teaching contracts commented that they were unable to do curriculum preparation during the summer break due to the uncertainty of their employment situation:

“The past two years final job assignments were not given until late August or early September, so unable to spend time preparing. Makes for a very hectic September”

“I finished my contract last June and did not work again until the school year started. I did not get a new contract until the end of September 2008, so nothing to prep for during the summer because I had no clue what or where I would be teaching.”
Time spent working in paid employment during the summer break

Teaching summer school

Of the 35 respondents who indicated they taught summer school over the summer break, about one-third (31.4%) spent up to three weeks teaching summer school. Another two-thirds of these teachers spent four to six weeks teaching summer school, spending a considerable amount of their summer break in this type of employment (Chart 5).

Other education-related employment

Of the 37 respondents who indicated spending some of their summer break in other education-related employment (other than teaching summer school), two-thirds (67.6%) worked up to three weeks in this activity. Another one-quarter (27%) spent from four to six weeks working in other education-related employment (Chart 6).
Employment not related to teaching

More teachers worked in non-teaching related employment (51) during the summer break than in teaching summer school (35) or in other education-related employment (37). Of these 51 teachers, about half (51%) worked up to three weeks in non-teaching employment. One-third worked four to six weeks in non-teaching employment (Chart 7).

What teachers say…

Based on the comments, most teachers who worked in paid employment during the summer break did so to supplement their own or family income:

“I work full-time during the summer since my student loan payments are huge. I do not earn enough money during the school year to live off in July and August.”

“Most summers I spend several weeks [working in my trade] earning extra money to ensure my family enjoys a good quality of life where a mother doesn’t work.”

“My summer work in construction pays significantly better than the teaching salary, albeit without benefits. I need to work to make ends meet.”

“This is my fourth school year working as a teacher on call and I do not make enough money to rely solely on that income, therefore I have to keep a second job throughout the year.”
Time spent working on professional upgrading during the summer break

Taking educational courses

Of the 65 teachers who indicated spending time during the summer break taking educational courses, three-quarters (75.4%) spent up to three weeks doing so (Chart 8).

Several teachers commented that they took university courses over the summer, some specific to their teaching specialty and others to upgrade their salary category. One teacher expressed concern about how year-round schooling might affect a teacher’s ability to do professional upgrading at university:

“While education is a great way to spend the summer, it does leave little time for relaxation. Whenever I hear about proposals to shorten the summer break, I wonder how those taking courses would possibly have sufficient time.”

Reading education journals/books

Many teachers (249) said they spent time reading education journals and books over the summer break, with about half (53.8%) spending one to two weeks on this activity (Chart 9).
The following comment illustrates the enjoyment teachers experienced in doing daily reading and browsing for curriculum materials over the summer break:


**Taking district-based PD**

In some cases, locals and school districts have agreed to allocate some days during the summer break when teachers may choose to undertake PD activities. Of the 95 teachers who indicated taking district PD over the summer break, most (86.3%) spent less than one week on this activity (Chart 10).

![Chart 10: Taking district PD (n=95)](chart.png)

**What teachers say…**

A few teachers expressed concerns about taking district-based PD during the summer break:

“I’m really not interested in using my summer to take PD, as many hours each day outside of school are taken up with school. I just want a break!”

“Summer breaks are precious to me and I try very hard to not do school-related tasks as I need the break. I do not agree with summer PD.”

“Was asked to attend PD during summer of 2008 and 2009, but refused. Attended PD in summer of 2007, which was strictly voluntary.”

“Recently it came to my attention that some schools are doing PD in the summer and using PD days in the year as days in lieu. I am concerned that this type of action will lead to a loss of PD days during the year and an expectation that we do PD in the summer.”

One teacher expressed her enthusiasm for taking district PD during the summer break:

“I like summer PD. I realize that the union has worked hard for all of the PD we get in [our district]. At the same time I feel it is educationally sound to have two PD days related to the same topic back to back. I find that I am more likely as an individual teacher and as part of a staff to implement what we learn to the classroom.”
Time spent volunteering during the summer break

About one in eight teachers volunteered during the summer break. Of these 73 teachers, 38.4% volunteered for up to one week and 45.2% for one to two weeks (Chart 11).

What teachers say…

Some teachers volunteered in work involving youth, including coaching or travel:

“This summer I will be volunteering my time [overseas], teaching English for three hours per day for four weeks.”

“Voluntarily took four kids on a seven-day [international] trip (taken for granted by everyone except the parents).”

“I was an elected official in our local government, serving as a municipal councillor for my city (volunteering and other work-related activities).”
Time spent on other work or work-related activities

Sixty teachers indicated they spent time during the summer break on other work or work-related activities not covered by the categories above. Almost all of these teachers (90%) spent up to two weeks in such activities. One-third spent less than one week doing so (Chart 12). Other work-related activities included attending BCTF conferences, union-related activities, coaching school teams, doing safety patrol, work related to art or music programs, and preparing for a student exchange.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of teachers by average weeks spent on activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 week: 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 weeks: 56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 weeks: 10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What teachers say…

Teachers engaged in many other types of activities over the summer break that related to their role as a teacher:

“Worked on fitness level to help me in my teaching of new P.E. course (over and above one week of prep).”

“Last summer break I spent taking courses in assertiveness training, stress management, psychodynamic, leisure activities, goal-setting in order to be better able to handle the stress of my job.”

A teacher working as a local president commented on how contract issues also need attending to during the summer break:

“Job of a local president is all year round. Contract issues continue throughout the summer. Often local president is under pressure to resolve contract disputes before the start of the school year.”
Changes to the school calendar that would affect the summer break

What teachers say…

Two teachers expressed concern about districts changing the school calendar to year-round schooling:

“Clean up and move my stuff to the next school is the first thing that gets done. Then three weeks to recover before I can enjoy the break. If we ever go to year-round school, I will never recover, and end up very sick.”

“Problem: my school is trying for balanced school year which means I would have no break in the summer as my summer would only be four weeks.”

Some teachers expressed a preference for a shorter summer break with longer or more frequent breaks during the school year:

“I wish we have a shorter summer break and instead had longer and/or more frequent breaks. Students and staff are exhausted in June and nine-week break is too long for many students to retain their skills, so much time is spent in review and remediation. I’d prefer six weeks break in summer and three other weeks added mid-year.”

“I would like to have school start the last week in August so we could have two weeks at spring break which would be a great de-stressor at this time of year!”

“I believe strongly that changing the school calendar to work three months, off one month, for a twelve-month period would highly benefit my profession and the children I teach.”
Chapter 4: How teachers spent their summer break

Changes since the summer of 2000, where comparable

The average number of weeks teachers spent taking a break increased to 5.7 weeks in 2008 from 5.2 weeks in 2000. Table 4 also shows that a higher proportion of teachers in 2000 took a break for zero to three weeks and seven or more weeks compared to the those in 2008 (2009 survey). It appears there has been a shift toward teachers taking a four- to six-week break since 2000, with 21% doing so in 2000, increasing to 42.7% in 2008. This may be a reflection of the older demographic in the 2009 survey sample compared to the overall teaching population.

Table 4: Time spent taking a break

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of weeks</th>
<th>2008 (Percent)</th>
<th>2000 (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 3 weeks</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 6 weeks</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more weeks</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2001 and 2009 surveys contained some comparable findings about the type of activities teachers spent time on during the 2000 and 2008 summer breaks, respectively. About the same proportion of teachers spent time preparing for the upcoming school year, volunteering, and teaching summer school in 2008 as in 2000. A higher proportion of teachers took educational courses in 2000 (16.3%) compared to 2008 (11.5%).

About the same proportion of teachers worked in employment other than teaching summer school in 2000 (16.5%) as in 2008, when the percentages of teachers working in other education-related employment (6.6%) and non-teaching employment (9.1%) are combined (15.7%).

Table 5: Type of activity teachers engaged in during the 2000 and 2008 summer breaks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity – Summer break</th>
<th>Percent of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the upcoming school year</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking educational courses</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching summer school</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment not related to teaching</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other education-related employment</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Quantitative results

Time off during the summer break
On average, teachers took a break (e.g., vacation, time off) for 5.7 weeks during the summer of 2008. The findings suggest that over the course of a teaching career, teachers seem to take more time off during the summer. A much higher percentage of the youngest (35%) and least-experienced teachers (63%) took a break for zero to three weeks compared to the oldest (13%) and the most-experienced (13%) teachers. Half of teachers with 25 or more years’ teaching experience took a break for seven or more weeks, while only 6% of teachers with less than 5 years’ experience did so.

Time spent on teaching activities during the summer break
Respondents were engaged in many types of teaching activities over the summer break. The majority of these teachers spent time on school-related work at the start and the end of the school year. These teachers spent an average of 0.7 weeks completing year-end tasks and 1.2 weeks preparing for the upcoming school year.

Teachers were also engaged in various types of professional upgrading. Almost half (44%) spent time reading education journals and books for an average of 1.3 weeks. About 1 in 10 teachers surveyed took educational courses. On average, they spent 2.5 weeks taking courses, with about one-quarter of these teachers spending 4 or more weeks on this activity. Some teachers (17%) attended district-based PD activities during summer break, for an average of 0.6 weeks.

While only a small proportion of teachers worked in some type of paid employment during the summer, this activity took up a considerable amount of their summer break. Those teachers who taught summer school (6.2%) spent an average of 4.2 weeks doing so; for teachers with other education-related employment (6.6%) the average time spent was 2.9 weeks, and those who engaged in non-teaching employment (9%) spent an average of 3.8 weeks doing so.

Changes since the summer of 2000
Teachers spent slightly more time, on average, taking a break during the summer in 2008 (5.7 weeks) compared to 2000 (5.2 weeks). About the same proportion of teachers spent time preparing for the upcoming school year, volunteering, and teaching summer school in 2008 as in 2000. A higher proportion of teachers took educational courses in 2000 (16.3%) compared to 2008 (11.5%). This may be a reflection of the older demographic in the 2009 survey sample compared to the overall teaching population.

Qualitative results

Recuperating and restoring work/life balance
Teachers had much to say about how they spent their summer break. The descriptive analysis of the comments reveals that many teachers spent the first few weeks of the break recuperating from the hectic demands of the school year, attending to personal responsibilities that had been put on hold during the school year, and caring for dependent or ill family members. While many

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teachers recuperated within one to two weeks, other teachers seemed to be greatly affected by
job stress and reported taking longer to recover.

Views on summer professional development
Most teachers who engaged in district-based PD in the summer spent less than one week doing
so. A few teachers expressed concern that summer PD may take away from time needed to
recuperate from the school year, or may increasingly be shifted from the regular school year to
the summer break. One teacher expressed the positive aspects of taking district-based PD during
the summer.

Classroom preparation in the face of uncertainty
Some teachers spent a considerable amount of time preparing instructional materials for the
upcoming school year. Some teachers expressed frustration either because they don’t know what
their assignment will be, or because they think they do know their assignment and do the
associated preparation, only to have their assignment changed, leaving them with time wasted.
Both cases illustrate teachers’ motivation to do work over the summer that will contribute to
their effectiveness during the upcoming school year.
CHAPTER 5:

BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work: A qualitative study

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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.
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Introduction

In this chapter of the study we report on both the satisfaction teachers derive from teaching, and the stress that they experience. Some teacher-worklife surveys, including those that BCTF Research has previously produced\textsuperscript{1}, catch the pain but not the pleasure of teaching, because they tend to focus on those issues troubling to teachers and their unions while in some cases failing to capture what satisfies teachers in their work. In this survey we asked BCTF members what provided them with professional satisfaction. In posing this invitation to share what satisfied them in their work, we are not ignoring those troubling issues of workload and intensity—indeed, there appears to be evidence of duality. In many cases, teachers are at the same time excited by and stressed from their work. If we want to capture the essence of BC teachers’ “work lives” (which suggests experiences that could include the positive) rather than “workload” (which often stresses the negative), then in this research we find and report those aspects of teaching that engage and excite teachers in their profession, as well as those aspects that cause teachers stress.

The satisfaction in teaching: What BC teachers say about the positive aspects of their work

It is clear from the survey returns that many teachers gain considerable satisfaction from teaching. Some comments embrace a wide-ranging view of the enjoyment of teaching:

“I enjoy teaching very much. I feel that I’m doing something very important, e.g., teaching critical thinking and literacy. I’m very enthusiastic about all facets of social studies and continue to read books, watch films and movies, listen to music and find art to bring into my classroom. I enjoy the creative opportunities of teaching. I enjoy all the time I spend preparing classes and units. I enjoy inviting students to be interested and motivated as I stand in front of them. I state my boundaries and expectations very clearly in September and I’m firm when these are tested. I find that my classes are generally well-behaved and recognize students’ need to test. I enjoy all my contacts with students.”

“...making learning meaningful; hearing a child read for the first time; reading a piece of writing the child has written; helping immigrant parents navigate the school system, paper trails, accessing support for their kids; finding funds to subsidize field trips, materials for the class; having a parent request for you as a teacher—this tells you, you must be doing something right.”

“...happy, satisfied students who look forward to coming to class and who leave happy. Students who learn to like themselves because they discover they are good at something...positive student feedback...motivating students, observing their success and watching their confidence grow. Students who choose to confide

\textsuperscript{1} Worklife of British Columbia teachers in 2001, \url{http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5648&libID=5720}
because they know they can trust you. Being respected by students and treated well by them.”

“...my students and the connections made with them. When on my three courses I have time to really get to know my students. It is wonderful to be able to help them learn and inspire them to be curious. It is an honour when they remain in contact after the course is over and after they have graduated from high school.”

The single greatest source of satisfaction stated by respondents to this survey is the teacher-student connection, interaction, and relationship. But relating to others in the education system was also important to many respondents’ sense of satisfaction.

Responses in terms of student connections and other relationships included three main areas:

1. Teachers want to engage students in learning, and gain satisfaction when it occurs

This may seem so obvious as to be hardly necessary to state, yet the vocation of teaching is partly epitomized by this statement, and the daily work of a teacher appears enriched when it occurs. So it is important to find that many BC teachers report immense satisfaction from this fundamental aspect of teaching:

One Science teacher respondent articulated six ways that this occurred:

1. “When a student struggles with a concept and then, in an ‘AH-HA’ moment gets it and you know you helped them get there!
2. When students develop an interest in science they didn’t have before.
3. When students develop an interest in science and say that you’re the reason.
4. When students have fun doing a lot and are excited about what happens and you hear them talk about it to their friends in the hallway.
5. When students help each other to understand.
6. When a student says “I never do well in science, I’m too stupid” and then they do well and are so proud of themselves.”

Such moments were reported by many respondents, including the following Music teacher:

“I still get tremendous satisfaction working with the kids. I love when I get to experience their ‘ah-ha’ moments. I still get tingling in my knees when they hit all the right notes with their recorders, or their voices come together in harmony. I love when my Grade 7s feel inspired and get involved in great discussions.”

Another teacher stated:

“The most satisfying aspect of my jobs is getting to interact with the students at my school and in particular to get to know my 30 students and create strong, trusting relationships with them where they feel free to talk to me about anything they need to and they know I am there to listen and support them no matter what the issue is.”

2. Teachers gain satisfaction when they feel that they are a positive influence on students’ lives

Respondents spoke of “being a positive influence in a child’s life and making a difference.” This, in part, includes the engagement in learning, but also encompasses a wider belief that teachers felt that they sometimes made significant and positive differences to a child’s development and life experience:
“I love teaching and making a difference in the kids’ lives most of all.”

“I love working with my students and can’t imagine doing anything else, even though it is a very challenging job. I love knowing that I have made a difference in my students’ lives and helped them to view themselves as capable and successful individuals.”

“...making a difference in the lives of individual students, knowing they like to come to your class and are learning.”

“I teach because I get the opportunity to build relationships with wonderful people. I know the impact that my teachers had on my life and I consider it a great privilege to be able to build into students’ lives in the same way.”

Respondents were clearly stating that a key factor in their satisfaction with teaching is positively influencing and impacting children’s development and children’s lives. Such views reflect more than just satisfaction—they touch on the nature of teaching as a vocation that relates to the description offered by David Hansen:

Despite a host of common obligations and practices, no two teachers have the same personal and moral impact on students. For better or for worse, every teacher has a unique and varying influence on students’ orientations toward learning, toward knowledge, and toward other people. Moreover, those differences have to do with a lot more than overt dissimilarities in personality and teaching style. They have to do with the ethos of the person, his or her characteristic conduct when in the presence of students, his or her reputation, expectations, hopes, fears, worries, and more. The relationship between a teacher and his or her students is invariably a moral one, even if that relationship is cold or impersonal or aloof—for those qualities themselves constitute messages about how to interact with others and how to regard and treat the products of human experience and effort. These claims support the notion that a person thinking about becoming a teacher may indeed have something to offer that nobody else can provide—even if he or she may not appreciate (as yet) what that “something” might turn out to be. (1994, para. 15)

3. Teachers gain satisfaction when they have positive and productive relations with colleagues and parents

While relationships with students are central to many respondents’ association with job satisfaction, their relationships with peers and parents are also significant. Many respondents listed the various aspects of their work which gave them satisfaction, which intimated a hierarchy of importance, with the usual order being students, then peers or other educators, and parents or community. One respondent listed the following as factors which contributed to her satisfaction when teaching:

1. “Watching children grow and learn
2. Working with peers who are collaborative and flexible
3. Working with parents who are eager to listen and co-operative with my professional expertise and experience.”
Another respondent suggested:

1. “Students; awesome relationship, and their growth and progress
2. Teaching partners; working with a team that is supportive and nurturing
3. Supportive school board and district staff
4. Supportive community services.”

These data stress the importance of relationship in terms of teaching students and in terms of working with other adults. For many respondents, when working and teaching relationships were positive, as many were, they contributed to teachers’ satisfaction with their work. Some teachers stressed such relationships as positives that get them to the school each morning and keep them in teaching.

“I love the relationships that I build with my students and colleagues. We laugh and have so much fun while learning.”

“I also get a great deal of satisfaction from my colleagues. I have a fantastic job-share partner. I also collaborate with our other Grade 6/7 teacher very closely and it makes the job more enjoyable when you have others to bounce ideas around with and to plan with.”

“I find the atmosphere of working and collaborating with colleagues to be an intense source of satisfaction. I take pride in being a member of a profession where members are strong in their convictions, vocal, and self-assured. The dedication I see on a daily basis is very rewarding and inspirational.”

Respondents also identified other areas as positives that create a sense of satisfaction in their work, and these are shared below.

- For many teachers, satisfaction comes from having autonomy

“I can teach what I want, how I want, within the curriculum guideline.”

Some respondents either expressly referenced autonomy or spoke of the freedom they had to teach in the way they wanted. Their capacity to make choices in terms of pedagogical approaches and in curriculum within the boundaries of the provincial curriculum documents clearly provided considerable satisfaction:

“I have freedom to teach...with a great deal of autonomy in regard to subject and curriculum focus, lots of freedom in how to deliver, what to deliver within the curriculum, how to support students in need.”

“I greatly enjoy the variety of the work I do; working with principals, vice principals, teachers, students, parents, agencies….I have a lot of autonomy. I am glad that the work I do is with people, helping students and families. This is very satisfying.”

Autonomy was not defined by any respondent, yet teachers’ comments provide a sense that there is a commonality of meaning: to have some space to make decisions, to do the job in a way defined by the individual rather than by an employer or administrator, to have the flexibility to change and adapt as necessary. The value placed on autonomy appears to be an interesting counterpoint to the value placed on community and relationships, suggesting that many teachers thrive in a combination of autonomous decision-making within a supportive community.
Chapter 5: BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work

- Teaching, for many respondents, was more about passion for teaching than about satisfaction with work

The survey asked teachers to comment on “the most satisfying aspect(s) of your work.” This was intended to explore the positive aspects of teaching, but to pose the question in a neutral manner. Responses to this question were surprising, in that a large number reflected a passion for the work of teaching, whether that passion was for the ‘ah-ha’ moment (that moment when a student “gets it,” when she or he acquires the understanding of learning a specific concept or skill), the joy in seeing children’s growth and development, or positive relationships with other teachers and administrators. Around 20% of respondents wrote comments which included the words “I love....” in expressing how they viewed their work, such as:

“I love it every day, collaborating with my colleagues, knowing that what I do every day is important; constantly learning.”

“As a French Immersion Grade 1 teacher, I love watching my students play and learn in French....I love to teach and like being part of a community.”

“I love sharing what things I’ve tried in the classroom, or ways I’ve adapted things to make them work with my colleagues. I love the creative process.”

Many others expressed the depth of their commitment to and enjoyment of teaching in less direct language, while still conveying the sense of being passionate about teaching.

For many teachers, the passion felt for their work encompassed more than one focus—often working with students, working in community, coaching students in sports, learning and changing as a professional. While there were many combinations of areas expressed in the reflection of teachers’ perspectives, the key areas within which they occurred were concerning the nature of teaching students and working in community with colleagues. When both aspects—respondents’ participation in the act of teaching and participation in community—were positive, then the teachers who offered their responses to this survey felt not only satisfied but passionate about their work.

Based on the data collected, it appears fair to say that many BC teachers find immense satisfaction in their teaching, primarily in terms of the act of teaching and relating to students, but also in terms of having considerable autonomy while being part of a school community. Relationships with colleagues and parents are also important in providing satisfaction.

The comments and perspectives shared by teachers also link to an area of literature briefly referenced earlier in this paper. Because education involves human interaction, the relationships involved in schools become pivotal to students’ learning and belonging, and to the sense of teachers’ satisfaction with the work they do. Nel Noddings discussed the need for teachers to have caring relationships with students:

I do not mean to suggest that the establishment of caring relations will accomplish everything that must be done in education, but these relations provide the foundation for successful pedagogical activity. First, as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in an ongoing relation of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach. They will not see our efforts as ‘interference’ but, rather, as co-operative work proceeding from the integrity of the relation. Second, as we engage our students in dialogue, we learn about their needs, working habits, interests, and talents. We gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress. Finally, as
we acquire knowledge about our students’ needs and realize how much more than the standard curriculum is needed, we are inspired to increase our own competence. (2005, para. 12)

In terms of professional relationships between adults in schools (teachers, administrators, and support staff), most of the literature focuses on the building of positive relationships through deliberative approaches such as professional learning communities. Coral Mitchell and Larry Sackney expand on three areas of capacity-building: personal, interpersonal, and organizational, all of which necessitate building and sustaining professional relationships:

Personal capacity is related to the ability and desire to reflect on, assess, and critique existing knowledge; to seek out new ideas and new understandings; and to reconstruct personal knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes as warranted by these analyses. Inter-personal capacity is concerned with the ability of groups of people to work together on shared purposes; to come to a set of shared understandings and agreements about their work; to generate effective group processes, expectations and outcomes; and to operate in a spirit of mutual trust, respect and psychological safety. These two sets of capacity are developed within a framework of organizational capacity that brings people into contact with one another, that invests heavily in professional learning and continual improvement, and that pays careful attention to leadership patterns, structural arrangements, communication and information pathways, and learning environments. (2009, p. 31)

The satisfaction that some teachers express likely derives from these kinds of community-building. Some teachers appear to have developed workplace cultures that may not be professionally collaborative but that are welcoming and inclusive, and that incorporate some of the qualities such as trust and mutual respect that Mitchell and Sackney articulate. Whatever the forms, and however they evolved, teachers’ satisfaction with teaching is in part about their place in community and their relationships with other adults and with students.

The stress of teaching:
What BC teachers consider to be the most stressful aspects of their work

Research shows that teaching can be stressful. To learn more about how teachers in BC are experiencing stress at work, the worklife survey asked, “Please comment on what you consider to be the most stressful aspect(s) of your work.” The following data are based on responses to this question.

For a significant number of respondents, there are multiple causes of stress in their work lives. And as it is with workers in any field who report stress, it appears that for many teachers it is the combination of factors that induces stress in such a way that work is often intensified:

“Teaching 30 students, with many lettered students in class as well as so many students that have behavioural difficulties, ESL, hyperactive, family difficulties, difficulties relating to peers. There is me and only me to handle all this—sometimes it feels like a three-ring circus. What about a personal home life??
Teaching is an all-encompassing job! Combine the above with supervision duties, professional day meetings, handling field-trip arrangements and going on them, hours spent on report cards, staff meetings, marking, creating programs for students with learning difficulties, staff meetings, committee meetings, working on projects with other teachers, meeting other teachers to discuss students, Learning Assistance, counsellor meetings, screening-meetings preparation, looking for and finding new materials, textbooks, creating worksheets, trying to teach the curriculum and finding time for me—AAAAAHHH!”

“When you try to break down the elements of stress in the profession of teaching it actually does a disservice to teachers. It’s not the individual items that cause stress, it’s the combination of things which actually causes stress. When we have our most stressful times, during report-card preparation, we also have all the other items to contend with at the same time. We can’t put the kids on automatic, and the meetings don’t stop; there’s still marking and planning; we still need to deal with behaviour issues and call parents, we still have the administration to deal with and the very real problems of kids not getting what they need at school and at home. This is when our stress levels are at their highest.”

“The most stressful elements of my job are all the obligations and expectations of others that pull me away from my lesson-planning and working with my students. Constant meetings, e-mails filling up my inbox every day, paperwork, coaching, with an inadequate amount of prep time to complete it all. Due to scheduling constraints at my middle school, I need to teach multiple classes, so I see between 80–90 students each day. This creates a very large marking load, and I find I have a difficult time keeping up with all the assessment samples I collect to mark. I have parents that want me to keep them informed of their child’s habits/ assignments on an almost daily/weekly basis, and want me to offer tutorials before and after school to keep their child on task with their work. I find my job often takes up much of my personal time, and I have to make sacrifices in other aspects of my life for the expectations of the career. However, unlike some other jobs, we teachers receive little or no benefits for all the additional overtime we are expected to put into the job.”

“The most stressful aspects are the continuing additions of things/subjects we must teach. Just lately, it is the Physical Activity; when do you fit that into your day? Math, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, etc., plus, now, 30 minutes of jumping around? Where? In my class? I try to cram all the requirements of learning for my students. Grade 3 Math, for example, is just too much for one year, especially if you teach another grade level. I, as a teacher, want them to have time to absorb new concepts before leaping to the next, to ensure my report card requirements are fully met. I find little time to enjoy my students. I rarely have time to just relax fun to get to know them. It is work, work. How sad. As for my stress level, it goes up and up.”

These comments express considerable strength of feeling about the stressful aspects of teaching, reflected both in the wording and in terms of rhetorical questions, punctuation, and capitalization—all ways that some respondents used to convey their message of the nature and impact of stress, and how such stress affects both their professional and personal lives.
There may also be gender differences in the effects of stress in terms of teachers choosing to work part-time in order to manage workload and stress issues:

“The most stressful aspect of my work is finding the time during my work day to complete all the tasks of my work day. There never seems to be enough hours in the day. At the end of the day I’m exhausted, but carrying home a briefcase of marking to be completed for tomorrow. I have chosen to work part-time because I could not raise and manage my family and work full-time as a teacher.”

“I can’t do a job this important (kids’ education) and still have a life with family, friends.”

A BCTF study of secondary English teachers (Naylor & Malcolmson, 2001) also explored evidence that suggests some female teachers may work full-time but are paid part-time, as they indicated opting for part-time work while using their own unpaid time for preparation and marking. In the current worklife study, there are several indicators that gender differences may be occurring in terms of responses\(^2\), but there is insufficient detail to be definitive. With the increased feminization of teaching, it may be timely to consider gender differences in terms of work and workload in future research.

A number of distinct areas of stress were identified by respondents, which are reported below.

- **Respondents reported feeling pressured by the demands of multiple tasks and limited time**

One respondent asked, “When do I get time to teach?” in a plaintive series of comments concerning constantly changing and multiple demands. In some cases, teachers spoke of the difficulties of discussing students with education assistants because no time allocation is made for EAs beyond their contact time with students. In other cases, completing report cards consumes considerable amounts of time. Whatever the factor, and there were many, the overall pattern in the data is that with multiple and increasing demands (e.g., daily physical activity) on teachers’ time, there simply is not enough time to manage the tasks:

“All the bits and pieces to weave together, never enough time. When teachers recognize a student has issues outside the norm they ask for help, but early intervention is not really very early. We are professionals who should be supported with the extra help to bring these students along. Instead, we have meetings, do more paperwork, and have even less time and energy for teaching. Nobody listens when we call for help. Administrators who do not provide the structure and set appropriate behaviour expectations in the school; hallways, assemblies, etc. Filthy floors, dusty everything, lack of storage, and space around children’s desks.”

For some, the demands mean that more work is being taken home and that this negatively impacts their home life:

“I do not feel that teachers are given nearly enough time to prepare lessons and to assess students. It seems that it is expected that we create innovative, dynamic, and flexible lessons according to our ever-changing class composition, but no extra time is allotted. When curriculum is changed, it is extremely stressful. Not

\(^2\) See Chapter 1, Demographic and employment characteristics of teachers in the survey and Chapter 3, Workload issues for BC teachers
because we don’t like change, but because no extra time is given to create new lessons. Even when the curriculum is not changed, I am constantly trying to implement new strategies, constantly changing my lessons to improve their delivery. All this has to be done at home! It takes time to be creative. I’d love to collaborate with other teachers; who has time?”

“Bringing work home: marking, doing reports takes away my family time.”

“Completing report cards (many hours), dealing with increased student (and their family) problems, lack of counsellor support, too-frequent staff meetings which take time away from planning/marketing/break time, and I have hours of marking to do at home at the present time.”

- **Respondents stated that the complexity of the classroom, in terms of class size and class composition, adds to their sense of stress**

Few teachers stated that class size in itself was their major stressor, but the combination of class size and composition made teaching and meeting student needs more difficult and therefore became a major source of stress:

“Class size and composition are the biggest sources of stress, usually. The types of Science labs I do have changed since the class sizes are larger. It is too difficult/dangerous to do some labs.”

Many teachers in the survey work in split-grade classes. Split grades usually were identified as a stressor alongside other factors, usually class size or composition:

“[Major stressors are] classroom composition and split classes. For the past three years I have had a split class and the composition of students has been very difficult.”

“Having a class of 30 students with 5 identified students with special needs, not including the students who are waiting for psycho-ed assessments. I am struggling to meet the needs of all students.”

- **Respondents described a lack of support for teachers in their efforts to meet students’ needs**

The perception that students’ needs are not being met is a consistent theme in the data, but this is linked to respondents’ additional perception that systemic failure to address unmet needs impacts the individual teacher and induces stress:

“...Not receiving support in classroom with children who may have special needs or behavioural (adjustment to school) needs upon entering Kindergarten. Support is very necessary during the first few weeks till pupils with special needs can be assessed and designated\(^3\) to be eligible for support.”

“....struggling to meet the needs of all students; not spending enough time with the regular kids due to demands of the time-takers in the classroom; seeing a huge swing from quality and effort to mediocrity; that teachers are not respected for the effort they make.”

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In this area also, most respondents grouped the concept of support with more than one issue, including limited access to education assistants, support for students with special needs, or access to diagnostic testing for students:

“[I have a] 4-grade split, 9–13-year-olds, even teaching PE has become stressful because young kids do not have skills or strength of older kids. Have had 2 grey-area kids on list for testing because I know they are not grey-area. Already March and no testing has been done. No speech pathologist, no real Special Ed at our school, no librarian, no support.”

“There are [a] high number of students with special needs with only partial EA support and no time before/after/during school to communicate with EAs and there is no availability of administration before and after school.”

The data from this survey show strong parallels with the 2001 BCTF Worklife of BC Teachers qualitative data⁴, suggesting that little has changed in terms of stress factors. However, the 2009 data appear to show a significant number of teachers who identify the lack of support as a key factor. In other words, the stress factors are similar between the two data sets, but in the 2009 data, teachers are suggesting that it may be as much the lack of support as it is the stress area itself that may be causing teachers to feel stressed. The notion of support is somewhat difficult to define, but respondents’ comments imply that the lack of support from any one or a combination of administration, parents, and peers is a factor which impacts them negatively. This speaks to the nature of school communities and the interactions within them. Where such interactions are positive, and where teachers feel supported in community, more teachers may be able to deal with issues that create stress.

Much has been written about “factory” or “industrial” models of schooling in which students and teachers are cogs in a system of schooling where outputs or results are paramount, and where the nature of community is rarely considered. Martin and MacNeil (2007) contrasted “school as factory” with “school as community,” arguing for a shift away from industrial models of schooling:

The key to community-building is involving and showing support for all members of the school, but the role played by teachers, who have the most direct relationship with students, is especially important. Schools that have this type of leadership are caring and nurturing place that create collegial teaching environments for teachers and successful learning environments for students.

The importance of informal interpersonal relationships is the most dynamic source of power in organizations today (Kanter, 1996). Schools need to use this power to develop commitment, equality and justice. Building community through school culture requires leaders that have a strong sense of purpose and encourage reflection and dialogue. (para. 3–4)

Martin and MacNeil’s analysis of and preference for school as community is a reminder that education in schools has much to do with human relationships, and where such relationships do not result in a sense of community which offers support, then stress appears to be increased. Examining the issue of improving schools as communities is also a source of some interesting current literature, including The School Community Journal, which focuses exclusively on schools as and within communities. In a recent edition, Keiser and Schulte (2009) state:

As school leaders seek ways to improve schools and districts, school climate is essential. Increasing academic performance, enhancing social and emotional skills, and even retaining quality teachers are all related to positive school climate, but trying to understand the complex patterns and subtle norms which create that climate can be perplexing (Belenardo, 2001; Osher & Fleischman, 2005). While containing elements of school safety, environment, teaching, and learning (Cohen, 2007), the heart of school climate may be defined as ‘the quality and consistency of interpersonal interaction within the school community that influences children’s cognitive, social, and psychological development’ (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997, p. 322).

It is through these interactions that relationships are formed and a sense of community arises. Belenardo (2001) identifies the elements of a sense of school community as shared values, commitment, a feeling of belonging, caring, interdependence, and regular contact. Perceptions of the school community will vary among individuals, but as they identify with their school and their role in the culture, common features of the group norms become evident (Griffith, 2000; Royal & Rossi, 1999).

Schools that display the shared values of fairness, justice, respect, cooperation, and compassion have a positive sense of community, supporting and motivating both teachers and students (Bushnell, 2001; Furman, 1998; Keiser & Schulte, 2007; Noddings, 1992; Osher & Fleischman, 2005; Schulte et al., 2002; Schulte, Shanahan, Anderson, & Sides, 2003). (p. 46)

While the nature of community is varied and complex, the data from respondents in this survey indicate that positive aspects of community (e.g., support and collegiality) in schools appear to increase teacher satisfaction, and negative aspects (e.g., lack of support, and isolation from peers) may produce stress in teachers. It therefore appears sensible to place more focus on the nature of community in schools as well as the work done in them in order to address issues of stress.

- **Lack of support to deal with problematic student behaviour increases respondents’ stress**

A number of respondents reported problematic student behaviour as a stressor.

Often this issue is compounded by what some respondents see as a lack of active engagement by school administrators and/or parents in dealing with behaviour:

“Administrator’s lack of support for students with academic and behavioural challenges.... Parents are too busy to do things with their kids.”

In other situations, respondents described unsupportive parents but very supportive school administration:

“Every year is different and presents different areas of stress. For example, extreme behaviour students with non-supportive parents make for a stressful year. Parents who question you and defend their child’s poor behaviour and who do not accept poor parenting as part of the cause. Thank goodness for strong supportive administration.”

In some comments, teachers stated that the behaviour comes from both designated and undesignated students. However, there are many other instances where teachers reported additional compounding factors, including perceptions of lack of support for dealing with behaviour:
“Dealing with behavioural challenges from a designated behaviour student, and lack of support from the EA (education assistant) working with him.”

Some respondents stated that the behaviour stemmed from a “grey area” student without any ministry special needs designation. In some of these cases, the lack of designation meant a lack of identifiable support, whether in terms of EA time or a specific program structure:

“Dealing with disruptive behaviour students without EA help. When a student is dropped from the behaviour district program because parents won’t follow recommendations given from the team and the student is returned to the classroom with no additional help because student does not come with any funds.”

It seems that levels of support to deal with behaviour vary, from considerable to minimal, and there is a range of people and roles who do or might offer such support. When there was some element of support, it seemed that more respondents stated that they were better able to cope with the behaviour, and reduce their stress. Conversely, where one or more people in administrative, parent, or education assistant roles were perceived as unsupportive, teacher stress appeared to be higher. In some cases, relationships with school administrators and district staff were strained and increased teacher stress.

- For some respondents, relationships with parents are strained and are a source of teacher stress

The issue of what some respondents see as the lack of parental support is not directed at the majority of parents, but at a minority whose communications or actions increase teacher stress:

“Parents. A few parents provide the most stress for the school as a whole. They often have unreasonable expectations, poor parenting skill, financial pressure. The few bring their own personal/social problems into the school, expecting staff to fix them. Negative letters to the Board, the media, on Facebook. The toxicity of these few can infect an entire staff.”

“Contact with parents. We have email and voice mail. Parents expect an immediate response, but I am teaching. I have very little time to read and respond via email in the day. I am not comfortable with phoning parents with other kids in my room (I don’t want to talk about a student while other students are in the room). Lots of parents think that I can fix the problem they have with their kid. They have had a relationship for 15 years, I met the kid only 6 months ago; so what can I do?”

It appears that part of the stress as it relates to communication or contact with parents is linked to work intensification, with parent contact arguably more frequent, and in some situations more problematic, than may have been the case when communication systems were fewer. For elementary teachers, contact with parents involves communicating with 20–30 parents; for secondary teachers, the number is potentially many more. Parents, however, have contact with far fewer teachers than teachers have with parents. In addition, as technology has become more pervasive, with access to cell phones, e-mail, and social networking, the frequency of parents initiating contact or publicly airing their concerns about teachers may have increased, as some respondents indicated, and may be a stress factor.
• Inadequate time for preparation and marking identified as a stress factor

“When teaching English 10 and 12 and Socials 10 my first year, I found the lack of prep time most stressful as creating good units and working took a lot of time working at home.”

“The prep time. 90 minutes a week in two 45-minute blocks or three 30-minute blocks is so far from adequate for primary. By the time you take your kids to the other teacher and then have to return for them, the time passes quickly. I have a Monday and Friday prep and miss many, which are not made up.”

“There is no time to reflect, refine, or rest. Little time for students, little time for prep, and little time for me makes for a very poor job (for all involved).”

These comments reflect issues from primary through to secondary. When prep time occurs, it appears to be limited, fragmented, and easily eroded.

For many respondents, the lack of time for preparation conveyed the sense of always trying to fit in multiple and competing demands so that the core elements of preparing for, delivery, and assessment of learning seems difficult to manage:

“The most stressful part of teaching is all the prep required to teach thorough lessons every day. There are not enough hours in the day (especially prep time) to do my job the best way I could.”

Some respondents are differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners, yet they struggle to find adequate time for the additional preparation required in order to differentiate:

“There is no time for meaningful collaboration and prep for differentiated instruction in order to meet the growing demands and needs of our students.”

The lack of preparation time could be a factor which may limit some teachers’ willingness to attempt differentiation. With significant cutbacks in specialist support teachers for inclusion since 2002, the demands on classroom teachers have increased in terms of meeting diverse needs. Differentiation and Universal Design for Learning encourage classroom teacher design of lessons which incorporate principles where units are designed to accommodate a wide range of learning styles. Yet, for many teachers, this may involve—at least initially—an increase in prep time as they access and use a range of approaches.

• Reporting causes a periodic increase in stress

For most respondents who articulated reporting processes and periods as stressful, it was the intense and periodic nature of reporting which added stress to the school year, with intense bursts of time. Some respondents described 20–30 hours spent on preparing report cards5.

For some teachers with young families, there were difficulties managing the work required at reporting times and done largely at home, together with the necessities of looking after their own children. Two such respondents said that it was stressful:

“...to complete report cards without extra prep time. Having small children at home makes it difficult to work on report cards during after-school hours.”

“Report cards, no matter what type, because of time to prepare them, are time away from class prep and cost to family life.”

5 See Chapter 3, Workload issues for BC teachers
For some, the mandatory use of BCeSIS added stress to reporting:

“My report cards take four times longer than when I did report cards using report writer.”

“BCeSIS—time, crashing, not always easy to log in. Impersonal report card comments to personalize, it takes way too long!”

Limited computer access in schools also causes stress for many teachers. For many, completing report cards at school becomes problematic when there is minimal access to computers:

“Right now I teach out of four different classrooms and none of these has a working computer. I do not have my own classroom. I do not have a computer to use for prep and report cards unless I line up to use one of the two computers available in staff workroom.”

**Stress in teaching and society: Final thoughts**

Stress in teaching appears to be inevitable, because teaching has become an increasingly complex job in which work has been intensified over time. Stress is also experienced because teaching involves relating to and interacting with students, other teachers, school administrators, support staff, and parents. It may be useful to separate the two areas—work intensification, and human interactions and relationships—in terms of considering approaches for improving teachers’ work lives.

Work intensification can be addressed both individually and systemically. Individual teachers may address stress factors to some extent by choosing wellness and lifestyle options that minimize stress. They may also choose to work within limits that are professional yet which make it possible to maintain health and minimize stress. However, whatever the individual teacher does, the major stress factors are systemic and require systemic attention and solutions.

Education systems can reduce intensification by reducing the mass of directives and expectations that seem to emerge each year. For example, the recent requirement for schools to provide daily physical activity may appear innocuous, but it reflects the trend to keep demanding that something more be done while nothing is taken away. An inquest jury in BC (2009) recommended that schools address domestic violence issues—a worthy goal, but one more task for teachers if such a program is introduced. Increased accountability demands also intensify work; one example is the excessive paperwork required to demonstrate accountability in Special Education. Foundation Skills Assessments and school league tables reflect other forms of accountability that add to stress, especially in those schools identified as less successful, usually schools in low socio-economic areas facing multiple challenges. Governments emphasize accountability, yet fail to recognize the costs and impacts of this emphasis, often negative, on those who work in schools. They add programs and initiatives, yet rarely fund them adequately or consider how to support the teachers who are directed to implement the programs. Government, therefore, through its systemic actions, can increase or reduce stress. The evidence to date suggests that the BC government’s systemic actions increase rather than reduce stress in the BC public education system.

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Chapter 5: BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work

Addressing the complexity of stress developing in a context of human interactions is more difficult. The progression in this area may involve consideration of building more caring and inclusive communities in addition to addressing specific issues of workload. Yet communities are influenced and shaped by both those who inhabit them and as well as by those who influence them from the outside. Such influences include school districts, the Ministry of Education, and government. Thus, in reshaping communities of schools, multiple influences need to be considered if less stressful communities are to evolve.

As reported elsewhere, the costs of teacher stress to individuals and society are huge, and require systemic attention. While teacher unions may address some aspects of the impact of stress on teachers through bargaining, rehabilitation, and other programs, little may change until government, employers, and unions reach some consensus on the problems of and solutions to stress.

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http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Publications/Research_reports/2008WLC03.pdf
Sources of work-related stress and changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction

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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.
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Introduction

A primary objective of the *Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey* was to better understand the factors that most contribute to teacher stress and to explore the meaning of these stressors in the context of teachers’ work experience. The survey asked teachers to rate their stress level, if applicable, for 47 stress related factors related to 1) Classroom/school; 2) Level of support for students; 3) Changes, involvement and control; 4) Administrative work, reporting, and testing; 5) Professional relationships; 6) Attitudes of others towards teachers; and 7) Technology. The survey included two open-ended questions for teachers to comment about their most significant sources of stress and job satisfaction. The survey also asked teachers about changes in stress level, workload, and job satisfaction; whether they are considering leaving teaching and reasons why; and if they would recommend teaching as a profession to others.

Due to the substantial amount of data collected in the survey with respect to work-related stress and job satisfaction, the results are reported in three separate chapters. This chapter describes the study results for the most significant sources of work-related stress for BC teachers; changes in workload, stress, and job satisfaction over five years; if and why teachers are considering leaving the profession; and whether teachers would recommend the teaching profession to others.

For an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions about stress and job satisfaction, see *Chapter 5, BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work: A qualitative study.*

For an examination of stress and job satisfaction data with respect to inclusion issues and Special Education teachers, see *Chapter 8, Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers, and the perspectives of all teachers.*
Sources of work-related stress

A major objective of the *Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey* was to identify the most significant sources of work-related stress for BC teachers. The survey listed 47 stress-related factors under 7 headings (described in the introduction on page 1 of this report). The survey asked respondents to indicate whether each of the 47 factors listed was a source of work-related stress and if so, to rate the level of stress on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being *very low* and 5 being *very high*. Space was also provided to indicate other sources of stress in addition to those already listed.

Ten most significant sources of work-related stress

The 10 most stressful factors for teachers, as measured by the percentage who rated their stress level as *high* or *very high*, relate to unmet student needs, class size and composition, attitude of the provincial government, report cards, BCeSIS, and standardized testing (Chart 1).

Two-thirds of respondents rated their stress level as *high* or *very high* due to inadequate support for students with disruptive behaviour and/or non-designated, “grey area” students, and class composition issues. Six out of ten teachers rated the unmet needs of students in the classroom/school as a significant source of stress. About half of responding teachers rated class size and level of support for inclusion of students with special needs as *high* or *very high* stressors.

The other highly-stressful factors are more political in nature, arising from the attitude of the provincial government (58.4%), the Foundation Skills Assessment test (50.4%), and BCeSIS (51%). Preparing reports cards is also a significant source of stress, with about half of teachers rating report cards as a *high* or *very high* source of stress.

![Chart 1: Ten most stressful factors—Percentage of teachers who rated the source of stress as high or very high (out of 47 sources of stress)](chart1.png)
Chart 2 shows the average level of stress associated with each factor, where 1 is *very low* and 5 is *very high* stress. Using this measure, the 10 most stressful factors for teachers are the same as in the previous chart, although the order is slightly different.

Based on the number of teachers responding to each factor, high stress factors that affect the largest number of teachers relate to support for student behaviour and unmet needs, class size and composition, and the attitude of the provincial government. BCeSIS is a major stressor affecting a smaller proportion of teachers, as is the Foundation Skills Assessment test, which affects Grades 4 and 7 classrooms.

### Chart 2: 10 most stressful factors (out of 47 sources of stress)
**Based on average level of stress, where 1=very low and 5=very high**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Level of Stress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of support for students with disruptive behaviour (n=508)</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class composition issues (n=485)</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support for non-designated, “grey area” students (n=492)</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet needs of students (n=481)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude of the provincial government (n=426)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support for inclusion of students with special needs (n=411)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing report cards – non-BCeSIS (n=340)</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) (n=218)</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of class(es) (n=432)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCeSIS (n=216) BCeSIS - report cards (n=148)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Work-related stress—by topic area

The following charts show the average level of stress (and number of respondents) for each factor listed in each of the seven topic areas. The average level of stress for each factor is based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1=very low, 2=low, 3=moderate, 4=high, and 5=very high.
Classroom/school factors and level of support for students

The data show that classroom/school factors and levels of support for students are significant sources of stress for teachers. Detailed figures are shown in Charts 3 and 4. Other factors such as inadequate access to specialist teachers (3.41), teaching split/multi-grade classes (3.37), inadequate learning resources (3.31), and the level of support for students living in poverty (3.26) also result in above-moderate levels of stress.

### Chart 3: Average level of stress—Classroom/school factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Average Level of Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class composition issues (n=485)</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet needs of students (n=481)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of class(es) (n=432)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to specialist teachers (ESL, Special Ed, LA). (n=364)</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split-grade/multi-grade class(es) (n=279)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate learning resources (n=405)</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment: classroom, school (n=299)</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teachers teaching on call (TTOC) (n=223)</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development (n=217)</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chart 4: Average level of stress—Level of support for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for Students</th>
<th>Average Level of Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...students with disruptive behavior (n=508)</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...non-designated, “grey area” students (n=492)</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...inclusion of students with special needs (n=411)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...students living in poverty (n=376)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...ESL students (n=330)</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...international students (n=210)</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Control over the work environment, and professional autonomy

Recent research links low job control to stress-related disorders\(^1\), job insecurity to negative health outcomes, and temporary employment to chronic stress\(^2\). Chart 5 indicates that teachers experience above-*moderate* levels of stress, on average, related to lack of control over the work environment (3.24) and changes in teaching assignment (3.23), with the latter affecting about half of teachers. Job insecurity is also a source of *moderate* stress (3.10) for about one-third of the sample. About one-quarter of teachers identified reconfiguration of schools as a source of stress, experiencing *moderate* levels of stress (3.03), on average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control over work environment (n=338)</th>
<th>Change in teaching assignment (n=269)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment (n=209)</th>
<th>Reconfiguration of school (n=155)</th>
<th>Teacher involvement in decision-making (n=340)</th>
<th>Professional autonomy about what and how I teach (n=283)</th>
<th>Competition between schools (n=197)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Job insecurity

Job insecurity is increasingly an issue for less-experienced teachers due to a significant erosion of teaching positions in BC public education over the past decade. The survey findings suggest that the funding crisis in public education is creating a growing sense of job insecurity and stress among new teachers in BC.

Teachers with less than five years’ experience (3.90) and teachers under 35 years old (3.84) experience considerably higher levels of stress associated with job insecurity/concerns about employment than the sample average (3.10). Teachers teaching on call (TTOC) experience the highest average level of stress due to job insecurity/concerns about employment (4.12).

Teachers who teach both K to 7 and 8 to 12 grades also have higher-than-average stress levels associated with job insecurity/concerns about employment (3.62 vs. 3.10 for the sample) (Appendix\(^3\), Tables 1a and 1b).

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\(^3\) The complete data are included in the tables of demographic comparisons in the Appendix.
Relationships with others

Studies have linked interpersonal relationships at work to stress-related disorders\(^4\) and job burnout in the “helping” professions\(^5\). This survey’s results (Chart 6) indicate that while teachers rated stress arising from administrative officers (2.76) and parents (2.73) higher than other relationships, overall, professional relationships are not as significant a stressor as factors related to the classroom/school, levels of support for students, and some administrative work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional relationships with...</th>
<th>1 = very low, 5 = very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officers (n=339)</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents of students (n=402)</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students (n=294)</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other teachers (n=320)</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching/education assistants (n=235)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district staff (n=208)</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-teaching professionals (n=161)</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attitudes of others

Teachers reported higher levels of stress due to the attitudes of others than they did for professional relationships with others. The attitude of the provincial government (3.71) toward teachers is by far the most significant source of stress in this category, followed by the media (3.26) (Chart 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes of...</th>
<th>1 = very low, 5 = very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>provincial government (n=426)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media (n=376)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school board (n=324)</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public (n=364)</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


\(^5\) For a review of the literature on job burnout and the role of interpersonal relationships between professionals in the “helping” professions (e.g. teachers, nurses, counsellors) and their clients (e.g. students), see Cordes, C. L., & Dougherty, T. W. (1993). A review and integration of research on job burnout. *Academy of Management Review, 18*(4), 621-657.
Administrative work, reporting, and testing

Chart 8 lists a range of administrative tasks that teachers engage in as part of their teaching responsibilities. The most stressful aspects of administrative tasks relate to student assessment. Teachers rated preparation of report cards, with BCeSIS (3.43) or without BCeSIS (3.52), as resulting in moderate to high levels of stress, on average. Testing is also a significant stressor, with the Foundation Skills Assessment for Grades 4 and 7 resulting in the highest average level of stress (3.43), followed by Grade 10 (3.17) and Grade 12 (3.07) provincial exams. About 60% of teachers identified prep time issues as a source of stress, resulting in an average stress level of 3.30.
Technology and 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.

Although all districts have agreed to use BCeSIS according to the BCeSIS management committee, the direct use by teachers varies substantially. The greatest level of use is by secondary teachers and secondary counsellors. Some elementary schools use it only for attendance, while others also use it for report cards, and in some cases, attendance may be entered into the database by a school secretary rather than the teacher.

This report focuses only on those teachers who reported that they directly used BCeSIS at the time of the survey. The mean scores for factors relating to technology indicate that the integration of technology into the teaching process has resulted in moderate to high levels of stress for teachers (Chart 9). BCeSIS is the greatest source of technology-related stress (3.43), followed by support for using technology in teaching (3.27), and in administrative work (3.10).

![Chart 9: Average level of stress—Technology](chart)

Other sources of work-related stress

The survey provided space for teachers to describe other sources of work-related stress in addition to those already listed. The responses can be grouped into major topics: work instability (frequent changes in schools/assignments/curriculum, downsizing, and declining enrolment); poor school conditions (noise, unclean facilities, construction, toxins, lack of heat); funding inadequacies (for textbooks, resources, technology, learning specialists, support staff); conflict with union (directives from locals, BCTF priorities); extreme student behaviour (aggressive/physical, school lock-downs, cheating); and personal demands (aging parents, financial stress, health conditions aggravated by work stress). Other sources of stress identified by individual teachers include poor travel conditions, insufficient time to complete student assessments, and dealing with loss or bereavement.
Chapter 6: Changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction

Changes in workload, stress, and job satisfaction

The survey asked teachers who have been teaching in the BC public school system for at least five years to report changes in workload, stress level, and job satisfaction compared to five years ago. The following three charts include the responses from the 487 teachers in the survey who have been teaching in public education for more than five years.

Change in workload compared to five years ago

Two-thirds (67.1%) of these teachers indicated their workload has increased compared to five years ago (Chart 10). Less than 5% of these teachers said their workload has decreased.

A comparison of the response percentages by teacher characteristics to the survey sample shows that teachers whose workload increased over the last five years are evenly distributed across demographic groups (Appendix, Table 2). This suggests that increased teacher workload is pervasive in nature, rather than being specific to gender, age, experience, type of teaching contract, or grades taught. There are indications that while increased workload is a pervasive issue, some teachers are affected in different ways, depending on the source of stress. For new teachers, for example, the stress is linked to job insecurity and constant changes.

A very small proportion of teachers (4.5%) reported their workload has decreased over the last five years. Late-career teachers and teachers teaching on call (TTOC) were more likely to say their workload decreased compared to their representation in the sample. Of those teachers who said their workload decreased, a higher proportion of them are 55 years or older (38.1% vs. 27.7% of the sample) and have over 25 years’ teaching experience (47.6% vs. 31.7% of the sample). TTOC comprise 13.6% of teachers who said their workload decreased, considerably higher than the proportion of TTOC in the sample (3.5%) (Appendix, Table 2). This may reflect a reduced availability of TTOC assignments for new teachers.
Change in stress level compared to five years ago

High job demands such as workload and work pressure are risk factors associated with stress-related disorders, as a recent review of the evidence confirms. Thus, one would expect the increased workload reported by teachers in this survey to be reflected in their stress level. Almost two-thirds (62.6%) of teachers said their stress level has increased compared to five years ago and one in ten teachers (9.9%) reported decreased stress levels, while 17% reported no change (Chart 11).

A comparison of the percentage responses in each demographic group to the overall sample revealed no major demographic differences between teachers whose stress level increased over the last five years and the sample (Appendix, Table 3). This suggests that rising stress levels are pervasive, affecting the quality of work life of BC teachers throughout the public education system.

One in ten teachers said their stress level has decreased compared to five years ago. Of those teachers who said their stress level decreased, a higher proportion of teachers are 55 years or older (35.4% vs. 27.7% of the sample) and a lower proportion are 35 to 44 years (18.8% vs. 29.8% of the sample) (Appendix, Table 3). This difference in age groups may be due to older teachers having more stable grade assignments in addition to considerable teaching experience and resources to draw upon compared to teachers in the 35-to-44-year-old group. Or it may be that some older teachers have taken steps to reduce their workload, such as reducing their FTE assignment.

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Change in job satisfaction compared to five years ago

As two-thirds of teachers experienced an increase in workload and stress level compared to five years ago, it is likely this will be reflected in changes in job satisfaction over the same period. Chart 12, below, illustrates this, showing that 42.7% of teachers reported decreased job satisfaction compared to five years ago. About one in seven (16.6%) teachers reported increased job satisfaction over this period.

Similar to the results for changes in workload, there are no major demographic differences among teachers whose job satisfaction decreased over the last five years. However, among teachers whose job satisfaction increased, there are some notable differences by years of teaching experience.

Of those teachers who said their job satisfaction increased, a higher proportion are teachers with 5 to 9 years’ experience (26.3% vs. 15% of the sample) and a lower proportion are teachers with over 25 years of experience (18.8% vs. 31.6% of the sample) (Appendix, Table 4). These data likely reflect the fact that the first group of teachers (5 to 9 years) has developed beyond the early hurdles of teaching and now have greater job security, while the more-experienced group (over 25 years) reflects increased stress without corresponding job satisfaction.
Teachers leaving the profession

The survey asked teachers if they are considering leaving teaching for reasons other than retirement, and if so, to state their reasons. Most teachers in the survey (95%) answered this question, with one in five respondents stating they are considering leaving the teaching profession (Chart 13). This finding likely reflects a reaction to the increased workload, stress levels, and loss of job satisfaction reported by teachers in the survey.

![Chart 13: Are you considering leaving teaching for reasons other than retirement?](chart)

No 74%
Yes 21%
Not Answered 5%

Which teachers are most likely to leave?

The characteristics of teachers considering leaving the profession were examined. The data, which are shown in Table 5 (Appendix), compare the percentage of teachers who are considering leaving the profession to the percentage of teachers in the survey sample for each demographic group.

Gender does not appear to be a factor, but age and experience do. A higher proportion of mid-career teachers are considering leaving the profession compared to their representation in the sample. Forty percent of teachers who are considering leaving the profession are aged 35 to 44 years, noticeably higher than the proportion of teachers in this age group in the sample (29.3%). Further, 25% of teachers who are considering leaving the profession have 10 to 14 years teaching experience, while only 17.7% of teachers in the sample have this much teaching experience.

A somewhat higher proportion of teachers who are considering leaving teaching are TTOC (12.6%) compared to their representation in the sample (7.4%) (Appendix, Table 5). Insufficient work and lack of opportunity for contract positions may be pushing some new teachers out of the teaching profession.
Chapter 6: Changes in stress, workload, and job satisfaction

Reasons why teachers are considering leaving the profession

Teachers who are considering leaving the profession provided many different reasons. Those most often mentioned are summarized below with illustrative quotes. A few teachers said they may leave teaching for family reasons, although not necessarily on a permanent basis, but most of the comments indicate that teachers are considering leaving the profession due to deteriorating working and learning conditions. The written responses also reveal that making a decision to change careers is due to a combination of factors that interact with each other to make teaching less tolerable.

- **Stress, burnout, and work/life balance**

  Stress and emotional burnout are factors motivating some to consider leaving the teaching profession:

  “Burnout due to children not receiving timely support, e.g., a school nurse for one morning a week for [a large school] (low income, transient, immigrant), waits for all referrals for testing. Not enough appreciation from parent groups, e.g. PAC.”

  “Burn-out. I am trying to arrange a personal sabbatical for myself next year—unpaid of course to try to re-charge and be able to continue teaching as I feel a true and strong vocation but find it truly does take over my life and leaves so little for my family.”

  Related to this was lack of work/life balance and the desire to find work that would allow more time for family or personal interests:

  “Not enough time for my personal life. Always carrying the stress of school around, 24 hours a day. Seeing that there are many other occupations where people work 40 hours/week, not 60–70, and get paid more than teachers do but with less education. Not feeling appreciated by the general public.”

- **Health conditions**

  Health conditions, other than work stress, are another reason some teachers are considering leaving the profession:

  “I was diagnosed with a serious illness two years ago and realized that life is too short to spend it feeling so stressed. Also the year I was off from teaching I didn’t get sick once. Now that I am back to work, I catch at least two bad colds per year. My health is my priority now and teaching is not a healthy environment.”

  “I find it very difficult to control my illness given the stresses of the job and the lack of time to take care of myself. Because I was working as a TOC for many years my pension would only be about $1,000 a month if I retire early.”
• **Increased workload**

Many teachers expressed the concern that increased workload and changing expectations were eroding their sense of well-being, job satisfaction, and overall desire to continue teaching:

“Stress, demanding workload, lack of balance in personal life. These factors can compromise one’s sense of well being at times.”

“All of the above: (1) Decreased job satisfaction, due to administration; (2) increased workload, preps and split classes; (3) Increased stress due to unresponsive administration. This is the first time in over 30 years of teaching that I have had to take a leave of absence.”

“I feel that I cannot keep up, physically, with the demands of parents and administrators when the needs of students continue to grow, but support and resources continue to diminish.”

• **Lack of encouragement**

Some teachers expressed frustration with the lack of recognition and encouragement for the work teachers do:

“I have purposely made myself do less than I am capable of so that I don’t burn out and I hate working in a job where I am not encouraged or rewarded for doing the best job that I can, so, yes, I am always considering leaving teaching.”

“Lack of appreciation, demands are increasing and the time is still the same, climate is changing in terms of respect for teachers and their profession.”

• **Harder to feel effective as a teacher**

Other teachers feel that current conditions in public schools make it difficult to feel effective as a teacher:

“Teaching is no longer as fulfilling and rewarding as it was when I began teaching 20 years ago. I feel it is much more difficult to have an impact…or effect change. I blame this on long term, chronic underfunding of education for over 20 years.”

“Marking, marking, and marking. Giving feedback to students is essential to their development and learning, but finding time to give adequate and accurate meaningful feedback is difficult.”

“I don’t feel effective in my job. I do not actually teach anymore; I babysit, counsel, soothe parents, fight for simple rights such as working in a properly heated environment with proper lighting.”

“The toll this job is taking on my health and personal life. Increasing workload and accountability and decreasing budgets making it difficult to do those extras such as field trips, cooking, special art projects, etc that break up the monotony of daily lessons.”
• **Dissatisfaction with provincial and district governance**

Dissatisfaction was expressed toward the provincial government and to some extent school districts for eroding support to students and implementing too many changes in the classroom:

“Tired of school-based admin and district office. Tired of the government’s policies. Tired of being told we have one of the best if not the best education [systems] in the world on the one hand and then made to feel like we aren’t doing a good job on the other. Too many changes implemented in district and provincially that are not about teaching and real change but about padding someone’s resume or political [career?].”

“After 23 years, having started with the intention of teaching 35 years, I am preparing to leave teaching. I love French Immersion. I love the kids, the colleagues, the parents, the stuff we teach. The Ministry’s approach, and our loss of teaching and non-teaching support, have made me feel desperate about the job. We need paper, computers, staff assistants, education assistants.”

“Poor pay for the hours required, lack of respect in the classroom and in the public eye, administrative teams that sacrifice teachers and learning environments for political gain, disillusionment with the career I thought would allow me to make a difference.”

• **Job insecurity and pay provisions**

Some teachers said they were considering leaving due to a lack of job security:

“Inability to get permanent work. It is extremely difficult to have a regular family life when you are working on-call, and don’t know until the morning if you are working or not. I am unable to pay for daycare when I am not sure if I will use it or not. I realize that that is just the nature of the work as a TTOC, but it just doesn’t work well for our family.”

“It is hard to get a full-time continuing job. I feel every year is insecure in regards to work for me and I have a mortgage to pay. The division between school board and teachers is also very frustrating.”

Poor remuneration compared to other professions was also mentioned as a reason for wanting to change careers.

“As a ticketed tradesman with good industry contacts, I regularly am approached with work offers. The money is tempting. I love teaching Industrial Ed, but there are times when it is likely I will stop teaching….”

“Financial and hours of work. I have significantly better paying prospects with significantly less hours of work, without all of the governmental interference.”
• **Retiring earlier due to demanding work conditions**

A few experienced teachers said they would retire earlier than planned owing to poor work conditions:

“I will retire as soon as I am able to. The work drains me of energy and basically leaves me with not much left at the end of the week. I go from week to week, recuperate during the weekend and then do it all over again.”

“I will be retiring earlier because my job is becoming too demanding.”

**Do teachers recommend the profession to others?**

The survey also asked teachers whether they would recommend teaching as a career to others. One-third of teachers said they would not recommend teaching as a career to others (Chart 14).

Teachers who would or would not recommend teaching as a profession are similar in demographic characteristics to the overall sample except for two subsets. When answering that they would not recommend teaching as a profession, there is less representation from teachers under 35 years (10.3% vs. 14.9% of the sample) and more from teachers 45 to 54 years (36.2% vs. 31.9% of the sample) (Appendix, Table 6). While this is not a major difference, it may be an indication that teachers who have been in the education system for some time are becoming disillusioned with teaching. Much more remains to be learned about why teachers would or would not recommend teaching as a profession to others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 14: Would you recommend teaching as a career to others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong> 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong> 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Answered</strong> 7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Most significant sources of stress

Of the 47 sources of stress listed in the survey, teachers rated the unmet needs of students in general, problematic levels of support for students with behavioural issues and “grey area” students, and class composition as the most significant sources of stress. Attitude of the provincial government was rated as the fifth-highest source of stress for teachers, slightly higher than level of support for inclusion. Class size, and testing and assessment also ranked in the top-ten-most-significant stressors.

Job insecurity is increasingly an issue for less-experienced teachers, due to a significant erosion of teaching positions in BC public education over the past decade. The survey findings suggest that teachers teaching on call (TTOC) experience very high stress levels associated with job insecurity/concerns about employment, as do teachers with less than five years experience, and those who are less than 35 years of age. Teachers who teach both K to 7 and 8 to 12 grades also experience higher-than-average stress levels due to this factor.

Changes in workload, stress, and job satisfaction

The survey findings provide evidence that working and learning conditions have deteriorated over the last five years. At least two-thirds of the teachers surveyed said their stress level and workload increased compared to five years ago, and four out of ten reported decreased job satisfaction. A comparison of demographic characteristics revealed few differences in which teacher groups experienced increased stress or increased workload compared to five years ago. This suggests that increases in workload and stress levels over the last five years are pervasive, affecting teachers across BC independent of age, gender, experience, employment contract, or grades taught.

Reasons teachers are considering leaving the profession

One in five teachers said they are considering leaving the profession, with teachers who are mid-career being the most likely to say so. Reasons for considering leaving teaching include increased workload, stress and burnout, health conditions aggravated by stress, lack of encouragement, job insecurity, and dissatisfaction with provincial and district governance. Some teachers also commented that deteriorating working and learning conditions make it harder to feel effective as a teacher. Six in ten teachers said they would recommend teaching as a profession to others and one-third said they would not.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey findings suggest that teachers are experiencing significant stress in the classroom, in large part due to inadequate support to meet complex student needs and class size and composition issues. This may be partly due to the erosion of full-time equivalent (FTE) learning specialist positions over the decade. The findings also indicate that working and learning conditions have worsened compared to five years ago. Increased stress and workload appear to be reducing job satisfaction, which in turn is motivating teachers to consider leaving the profession. Increasing workload and stress not only have immediate implications for students in the classroom and for teachers’ quality of worklife, but will likely have an impact on teacher retention in future years.

Appendix: Tables—demographic comparisons

Tables 1a–1e: Stress related to job insecurity/concerns about employment
Table 2: Change in workload compared to five years ago
Table 3: Change in stress level compared to five years ago
Table 4: Change in job satisfaction compared to five years ago
Table 5: Teachers considering leaving teaching for reasons other than retirement
Table 6: Would you recommend teaching as a career to others?

Tables 1a-1e: Stress related to job insecurity/concerns about employment

Table 1a: Gender—Average level of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender (n=207)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b: Age group—Average level of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group (n=207)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1c: Years’ experience—Average level of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years experience (n=204)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>3.12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1d: Type of employment contract—Average level of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment contract (n=209)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time positions</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time positions</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1e: Grades taught—Average level of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades taught (n=192)</th>
<th>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>3.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 &amp; 8-12</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Change in WORKLOAD compared to five years ago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to five years ago, would you say your workload has:</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Stayed the same</th>
<th>Changed, but not increased or decreased</th>
<th>Percentage of the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (n=476)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group (n=477)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of teaching experience (n=476)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of employment contract (n=484)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time positions</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time positions</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught (n=461)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 and 8-12</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Change in STRESS LEVEL compared to five years ago

Compared to five years ago, would you say your stress level has:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Stayed the same</th>
<th>Changed, but not increased or decreased</th>
<th>Percentage of the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (n=475)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group (n=476)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of teaching experience (n=475)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of employment contract (n=483)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Full-time positions</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time positions</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught (n=460)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 and 8-12</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Change in JOB SATISFACTION compared to five years ago

Compared to five years ago, would you say your job satisfaction has:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Stayed the same</th>
<th>Changed, but not increased or decreased</th>
<th>Percentage of the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (n=474)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (n=475)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience (n=474)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of employment contract (n=482)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time positions</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time positions</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 and 8-12</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Percentage of teachers considering leaving the profession</td>
<td>Percentage of survey respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (n=531)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (n=532)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience (n=531)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or more years</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Full-time</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades taught (n=512)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 and 8-12</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Would you recommend teaching as a career to others?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Yes, would recommend</th>
<th>No, would not recommend</th>
<th>Percentage of the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (n=517)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age group (n=518)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 years</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of teaching experience (n=517)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25 years</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of employment contract (n=524)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time positions</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time positions</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTOC or both</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught (n=497)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach in both K-7 and 8-12</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 7:

Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of stress

Charlie Naylor, Ph.D.
Senior Researcher, BCTF Research

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.
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Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of stress

“I feel like I can’t keep up to the demands of the job, not enough time.”

“I feel that the stress of my constantly-changing workload has affected my emotional health.”

“There isn’t one issue that can be said to be ‘the’ stressor. It’s more like a death by a thousand cuts. Much more than normal, so it is hard to cope these days—the band-aids are running out.”

(survey respondents)

There are many reasons to be concerned about teachers’ stress. Multiple sources of data, including BCTF, national, and international studies, have documented increased stress in society generally, and high work-related stress in those public-sector workplaces that involve high levels of human interaction: education, health, and social services.

The Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey asked participants to indicate their responses to seven statements reflecting possible effects of work stress on their well-being. Responses to this survey offer some insights.

A significant proportion of teachers report stress having negative effects. Table 1, below, lists the survey statements, and the proportion of respondents who indicate that they experienced the stated effects most of the time or all of the time. Over half of respondents (51.5%) have difficulty “turning off” work concerns in personal time, while close to half (46%) find keeping up with workload demands stressful. Over one-third (34.8%) feel that job pressures interfere with family/personal life, and over one-fifth (22.5%) state feeling that stress has a significant and negative impact on their physical or emotional well-being.

Table 1: Effects of work stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative effects</th>
<th>Percent who experienced effect most of the time or all of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty “turning off” thoughts or concerns about work during my personal time</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find keeping up with the demands of my workload as a teacher stressful.</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that job pressures interfere with my family or personal life.</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my job is negatively affecting my physical or emotional well-being.</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my work life and personal life are in good balance.</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel there are enough hours in the day to meet all of my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have energy left at the end of the day, after I have completed my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from these data that many respondents are reporting that they experience work-related stress. More respondents report negative effects of stress than express positive reflections like having a good sense of balance between work and personal life. Teaching, for these respondents,
is consuming not only considerable amounts of time with long working hours in and outside of school (an average of 47.8 hours per week reported for full-time teachers\(^1\)), but it is also having considerable mental or emotional effects, with over half of respondents indicating that they have difficulty turning off thoughts and concerns about work in their own time. Thus, it appears that for many teachers, stress factors linger long after the working days are finished, with a range of impacts on well-being and personal lives and relationships.

On the positive side, a smaller but still significant number of respondents indicate positive perspectives, with one-third (33.6%) indicating that they feel that their personal and work lives are well balanced, and over one-fifth (21.7%) feeling some energy at the end of a day’s teaching. Yet even these data are troubling, for if one-third of respondents report balance between work and home lives, and one-fifth feeling some energy at the end of a day’s teaching, then, by implication, two-thirds are reporting an imbalance between work and home lives, and four-fifths are reporting no energy at the end of a workday.

**Gender and stress**

Triggers of workplace stress also differ somewhat between men and women. While men and women had a similar likelihood of feeling stress because of poor interpersonal relationships, threat of job loss, or having to learn computer skills, the likelihood of citing other triggers varied. Women between 45 and 64, regardless of family structure, were significantly more likely than men the same age to feel workplace stress as a result of too many demands or hours. (Williams, 2003, para. 29)

There is a clear indication of gender differences in responses to the statements of possible effects of work stress on personal well-being. In every question, female respondents report more negative effects than males. Such a pattern is a concern, in that it identifies stress as being perceived as a consistently more-serious factor for female teachers than it is for male teachers in the sampled population.

**Table 2: Effects of work stress, by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of work stress</th>
<th>Female (mean)*</th>
<th>Male (mean)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty “turning off” thoughts or concerns about work during my personal time.</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find keeping up with the demands of my workload as a teacher stressful.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that job pressures interfere with my family or personal life.</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my work life and personal life are in good balance.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my job is negatively affecting my physical or emotional well-being.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel there are enough hours in the day to meet all of my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have energy left at the end of the day, after I have completed my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=never, and 5=all of the time

\(^1\) See Chapter 3, *Workload issues for BC teachers*. 
Previous BCTF studies (Naylor and Vint, 2009; Naylor, 2008, 2001) that include analysis of the international literature have also identified gender as a factor in differences of reported stress and possible coping mechanisms. The 2008 study reported:

In terms of gender, Park (2008) reported that more employed women reported higher stress than men. An Australian study (Timms, Graham, & Caltabiano, 2006) indicated higher levels of stress by female elementary teachers while Naylor & Schaefer (2003) found higher stress levels reported by BC female teachers than male colleagues. Pei and Guoli (2007) report significant gender differences in terms of stress affecting teachers in China. There is evidence that some women may be carrying substantial responsibilities for children and aging parents—the so-called “sandwich generation” of Canadian women with dual and significant family responsibilities:

> They are called the ‘sandwich generation,’ or people caught between the often-conflicting demands of raising children and caring for aging parents or other relatives. And their life can be particularly stressful and hectic. Almost 3 in 10 of those aged 45 to 64 with unmarried children under 25 in the home, or some 712,000 individuals, were also caring for a senior, according to a new study based on the 2002 General Social Survey. More than 8 in 10 of these sandwiched individuals worked, causing some to reduce or shift their hours or to lose income. Indeed, caring for an elderly person could lead to a change in work hours, refusal of a job offer, or a reduction in income. Some 15% of sandwiched workers had to reduce their hours, 20% had to change their schedules and 10% lost income…Women were more likely than men to be sandwiched (StatCan Daily, September 28, 2004). (Naylor, 2008, p. 3)

A recent report from the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (June 2010) documented a Canada-wide increase in the number of working-age adults providing care to seniors. Accessing StatCan data, the report showed that 17.4% of working adults provided care to seniors in 1996, a number which had increased to 19.5% by 2006. StatCan data also stated that a higher proportion of females (22.5%) than males (16.3%) provided care to seniors, and for more hours per week. The report also estimated that 16.8% of working adults had responsibility for both childcare and elder care in 2009.

In the Naylor and Vint (2009) BCTF study, comparisons were made by gender of claimants to the BCTF’s Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP), which provides benefits to teachers who are unable to work but have utilized all sick-leave entitlements. Data showed that proportionately more women than men made SIP claims:

> 24% of SIP claims were from male teachers, while 76% were from women. 31% of BC teachers are men and 69% women. Women are therefore making a greater proportion of claims than might be expected related to their numbers, but this is consistent with findings from a wider literature. (p. 1)

There is some discussion of gender differences in terms of coping with stress in a range of literature, aptly described by Iwasaki, Mackay, and Mactavish (2005):

> Although gender has not been a primary focus of inquiry in stress and coping research, researchers have increasingly given greater attention to the role that
gender may play in explaining the use of coping methods. For example, Ptacek, Smith, and Dodge (1994) proposed that gender differences in coping strategies could arise from early socialization that promotes stereotypes of women as emotional, supportive, and dependent, compared to men who are portrayed as independent, instrumental, and rational. Evidence, however, shows that females tend to use behavioral coping (e.g., taking direct and positive actions to deal with problems) more actively than males (Fielden and Davidson, 2001). Similarly, Gianakos (2000, 2002) found that women were more likely than men to use direct action coping to deal with stress by working longer and harder. Gianakos (2000) also noted that working women might utilize coping skills such as active planning and time management to juggle work and family responsibilities effectively. She suggested that this result might be explained by the idea that employed women must work harder to survive in careers, particularly when their professions are male-dominated. (p. 2, web version)

Differences in women’s and men’s perceptions of control, influence, and power over life may be another aspect responsible for gender variations in stress-coping. According to Phillips-Miller, Campbell, and Morrison (2000):

Women tend to have less control over resources for coping with job stress, less influence on their work environments and their male colleagues, and less power in marital relationships to bring about a more equitable distribution of child care and household responsibilities. (p. 17)

This perspective is supported by findings reported by Apostol and Helland (1993), Duxbury and Higgins (1991), and Steil and Weltman (1992). It also has been suggested that lower perceived control, influence, and power in home and work domains may limit the range of effective coping strategies available to women and increase role overload and depression (Greenberger and O’Neil, 1993). Supporting this contention, Davidson and Fielden (1999) noted that “in comparison to men, women tend to report significantly poorer mental health, characterized by low self-esteem, increased self-doubt, and self-blame.” (p. 425)

Iwasaki et al.’s assertion that “women take direct and positive action” to deal with stress suggests that women may be more likely than men to recognize and deal with stress in their work and lives. Thus it may be that women are more likely to report feeling stressed than males, while it is also possible that males are more stressed than they report if they are less likely to recognize and deal with stress.

**Age and stress**

Differences in responses from teachers in different age categories were also analyzed. Conclusions generated from responses sorted by age are less clear than when sorted by gender. However, there appear to be somewhat higher perceived negative effects of stress in most questions from teachers aged 35 to 44 in most categories. In the Naylor and Vint (2009) study of stress-related claims, 16% of claims were from males who were aged 35 to 44, while 26% of claims in the same age category were from women. This suggests that there may be particularly significant stressors for women in that age group, a finding supported by the StatCan (2004) study.
Elementary/Secondary differences

There were few, and relatively minor, differences between the responses of teachers in elementary and secondary grades in terms of the perceived effects of stress, with one exception: slightly fewer elementary teachers than secondary teachers feel they have energy left at the end of the day after completing teaching responsibilities.

Conclusion

The evidence from this survey and from a wide range of literature is that stress impacts women more than men, and in teaching, a profession where the female-male ratio is steadily increasing, the effects of stress on women require greater consideration. The issue of gender in terms of workload has not been prominent in BCTF debates, yet this range of evidence suggests that it may be time to re-engage with a closer consideration of gender and stress within the union. A wider employer and governmental consideration of stress is also required because of the rapid growth in stress-related illness with high economic and social costs. With evidence that education, health, and social service workers are at highest risk, it makes strong sense that these areas should be considered. Yet, sadly, there appears to be no indication of interest in these issues to date on the part of many employers or federal or provincial governments.

It is harder to make any definitive statements from these data with relation to differences in responses in terms of the age or grades taught (elementary/secondary) of the respondents. However, data from a study of stress-related claims in the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan indicate that over 60% of SIP costs for claims linked to Psychological/Psychiatric disorders are linked to teachers over 50, while only 39% of BC teachers are aged 50 or older. Older teachers are therefore significantly over-represented in SIP claims. Such data bolster the case for considering funding and implementing an Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP) for older teachers in BC’s public schools.

Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of stress found in this survey are consistent with the actual effects of stress that are outlined in the wider literature. A range of work/life balance programs exist, and other initiatives or personal efforts can be taken, to enable individual teachers to better manage stress. However, many of the stress factors identified in the literature are systemic. Ideally, addressing such systemic factors should be a system responsibility, yet there appears to be little effort being made to consider changing the BC educational system to reduce workload and stress for those who teach within it. An ideal combination would be to address systemic factors while also supporting work/life balance; in BC, however, as in many other jurisdictions, the onus lies on the individual, while the system does little to address the factors that cost both individuals and society dearly.
References

Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2010). *Caught in the time crunch: Time use, leisure and culture in Canada. A report of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.*
http://www.ciw.ca/Libraries/Documents/Caught_in_the_Time_Crunch.sflb.ashx


Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers, and the perspectives of all teachers

Charlie Naylor, Ph.D.
Senior Researcher, BCTF Research

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.
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Introduction

This report, based on data collected from the Worklife of BC Teachers: 2009 survey, addresses two areas of focus relating to Special Education, Learning Assistance, and inclusive education issues: one involves consideration of the work and perspectives of respondents who work in Special Education and Learning Assistance, and the other considers the perspectives of all respondents in terms of issues related to inclusive education.

The work and perspectives of learning specialist teachers¹ who teach in Special Education and/or Learning Assistance

A total of 54 respondents (out of 111 learning specialist teachers, and 563 total respondents), identified as working in Special Education or Learning Assistance, or a combination of the two. 90.2% of these respondents are female, compared to 76.5% female respondents in the overall survey returns. Among them there is a slightly lower proportion who have taught for less than 10 years than in the overall sample (21.2% vs. 23.6%), and a higher proportion who have taught for 10 to 19 years (42.3% Special Ed/LA teachers, compared to 35% overall). This likely reflects an under-representation in the survey returns of newer teachers in Special Education assignments, as there is evidence that many Special Education and Learning Assistance positions are filled by new teachers². It may be worth considering undertaking research in the future which focuses on those who are both new to teaching and in Special Education roles, as anecdotal evidence suggests that for many, Special Education is seen as a temporary post until a classroom teaching position can be obtained. The placing of new teachers in Special Ed/LA roles is problematic for two reasons. The first is that such teachers lack the experience of teaching in classrooms. This makes it difficult for them to support inclusion in classes when they have little experience in classrooms. The second reason is that while it is possible that some teachers remain in Special Education/Learning Assistance, if others leave the role as soon as a classroom position is available, then the Special Ed/LA position may be filled by another inexperienced teacher. This “cycle of inexperience” is not conducive to building more inclusionary classrooms.

The average full-time equivalent (FTE) assignment for those respondents working in Special Education roles is 0.54 FTE. For those working in Learning Assistance, it is 0.42 FTE, and for those in combined Special Ed/LA roles, their time allocation in the roles averages 0.75 FTE. Of the 54 Special Ed/LA respondents, 63% also have work assignments as enrolling teachers, with an average of 0.4 FTE in the classroom.

These data reflect the fragmentation of the Special Ed/LA teacher’s role, which has been evident as a trend and pattern since provincial government actions in 2002 that resulted in major cuts to Special Education staffing numbers. These were documented in a PSA/BCTF Research

¹ “Learning Specialist Teachers” were formerly known as “non-enrolling teachers” (i.e., they do not have a homeroom class). These include teachers who work in Special Education, Learning Assistance, ESL, Aboriginal Education, and those who are teacher-librarians or counsellors.

discussion paper (2003)\(^3\), which showed that the cuts made to Special Education staffing were more than double the level of cuts to overall teacher staffing numbers. More recently, a BCTF brief to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (2010)\(^4\) reported that, based on Ministry of Education data, the loss of FTE positions in Special Education between 2001–02 and 2009–10 totalled 648.10 FTE.

This stunning and disproportionate reduction juxtaposes the government’s policy mandating inclusion, on the one hand, with government actions, on the other, that leave school districts little option but to make cuts to Special Education and Learning Assistance services, and to the staffing which supports inclusion. Thus, school districts take the brunt of criticisms for cuts when in fact these are precipitated by provincial government funding and policy decisions.

As mentioned above, when the BC government stripped ratios of Special Education teachers from contract language and discontinued targeted funding for students with high incidence special needs in 2002, school districts slashed staffing in Special Education and Learning Assistance by over 18%. As a result, teachers in remaining Special Ed and LA positions faced increased workload and job fragmentation, with reduced time allocation being the new norm. Many experienced Special Ed/LA teachers opted for a classroom assignment rather than continuing in a role which some described as being “between a rock and a hard place,” in that they found it increasingly difficult either to meet students’ needs or to adequately support classroom teachers.

To get a better understanding of whether aspects of teachers’ work lives have changed over time, for whatever reason, the worklife survey asked about job satisfaction, workload, and stress level compared to five years, and data for specific groups of respondents were compared. The groups examined here are Special Education and Learning Assistance teachers, other specialist teachers (including ESL and Aboriginal Education teachers, teacher-librarians, and counsellors), all specialist teachers combined, and the overall sample who responded to each question (both learning specialist and classroom teachers).

In terms of job satisfaction at the time of the survey compared to five years earlier, there are some minor differences between categories of specialists, but there are more significant differences between all specialist teachers and all respondents in terms of job satisfaction, as shown in Table 1. These data show that a higher proportion of specialist teachers feel their job satisfaction has increased compared to five years ago than the sample as a whole (29.9% vs. 16.8%). Of the specialist teachers, those in Special Education/Learning Assistance have less increase in job satisfaction (26.1%) than other specialists do (33.3%). It can be inferred from the data that those teaching in Special Ed/LA assignments may have lower levels of job satisfaction than other specialist teachers. While barely one in four Special Education teachers stated that their job satisfaction has increased, this is significantly higher than the overall teacher response to this question, where an alarmingly low 16.8% of respondents indicated higher job satisfaction now than five years ago. Many more teachers reported decreased job satisfaction than reported increased job satisfaction (43.1% vs. 16.8%).

\(^3\) [http://bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5770]

\(^4\) [http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/Briefs/2010EdFundingBrief.pdf]
Table 1: Job satisfaction compared to 5 years ago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Special Ed/LA teachers</th>
<th>Other specialist teachers</th>
<th>All specialist teachers</th>
<th>All respondents to the question (n=483)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that almost three-quarters (73.9%) of responding Special Education/Learning Assistance teachers reported increased workload compared to five years ago, while about two-thirds (67.4%) of the overall sample indicated increased workload. Slightly more Special Ed/LA than other specialist teachers reported a workload increase. Data from a BCTF study with teachers in Nanaimo and Coquitlam school districts in 2003

http://bctf.ca/issues/research.aspx?id=5842

provides an interesting perspective: for the two districts, 34% and 46% of Special Education teachers reported an increase in caseloads when comparing 2002–03 to the previous school year of 2001–02. While these numbers are significant, they are only half of what is being experienced now.

Table 2: Workload compared to 5 years ago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Special Ed/LA teachers</th>
<th>Other specialist teachers</th>
<th>All specialist teachers</th>
<th>All respondents to the question (n=485)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that such large proportions of respondents in the current survey reported an increase in workload is a cause of concern, and may suggest that it is the impact of reduced numbers of Special Ed/LA teachers that is seriously impacting specialist teachers’ workloads.

In terms of stress levels, Table 3, below, shows that almost two-thirds (65.2%) of Special Ed/LA teachers reported increased stress now compared to five years ago, a figure slightly higher than that reported by all respondents (63%).

Table 3: Stress level compared to 5 years ago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Special Ed/LA teachers</th>
<th>Other specialist teachers</th>
<th>All specialist teachers</th>
<th>All respondents to the question (n=484)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The worklife survey provided a list of 47 possible factors within 7 areas of work which may cause stress for teachers. Nine of those factors were selected for analysis because of their connection to the work of Special Education/Learning Assistance teachers. Table 4 presents the percentages of Special Education/LA teachers and of all respondents who rated the listed potential stress factors as causing high or very high levels of stress.

Three factors prompted an indication of high or very high stress levels from a similar proportion of both Special Ed/LA respondents and all respondents: class composition issues, level of support for “grey area” students, and level of support for inclusion. These were also the top three factors in terms of response rate. Slightly more Special Ed/LA teachers than all respondents (50% vs. 43.7%) indicated that inadequate access to other specialists was a high stress factor. However, there were major differences between Special Ed/LA teachers and all respondents in terms of Individual Education Plans (IEPs)—a stressor for a greater proportion of Special Ed/LA teachers than classroom teachers, especially in terms of online IEPs (44.4% vs. 24.1%). A lesser proportion of Special Ed/LA teachers reported high or very high levels of stress from lack of control over work environment (30.3% vs. 41.5%) and job insecurity (27.3% vs. 38.8%) than did all respondents.

While not among the highest stress indicators, Special Ed/LA teachers’ professional relationships with non-teaching professionals reflected almost double the rating of stress indicated by all respondents.

**Table 4: Potential stress factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential stress factor</th>
<th>Percentage reporting high/very high level of stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Ed/LA teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class composition issues</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support for non-designated, “grey area” students</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of support for inclusion of students with special needs</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to specialist teachers (ESL, Special Ed, LA)</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs – online</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs – paper</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control over work environment</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships with non-teaching professionals (e.g., Speech Language Pathologists, etc.)</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four of the nine stress factors generated indications of high or very high levels of stress from 50% or more of Special Education/Learning Assistance teacher respondents. The one perhaps surprising finding in terms of the issue becoming a greater stressor at this time is the high level of stress indicated over level of support for “grey area” students—students who are not designated in terms of special needs, but who need additional help to succeed. Now that many Learning Assistance roles have been amalgamated into Special Education/Learning Assistance combinations, the levels of concern indicate that many of these students may not be able to access the help they need, and the inability of specialist teachers to provide support because of increased caseloads and reduced time may be a stress factor. One respondent stated:
“I’m finding it increasingly difficult to help students that are in the grey area. They are not low enough (intellectually or behaviourally) to have full support (from educational assistants or LA teacher) but they require a huge amount of support in the classroom. These students require 80% of my time, effort, and energy and are not succeeding because of a variety of factors (home-life, attitude, laziness).… The intermediate class in elementary now has so many students at a variety of levels that it is almost impossible to provide them with the education they deserve (i.e., a Grade 4 class with math levels from 1–6 or reading levels from 1–8).”

Similarly to other respondents, Special Ed/LA teachers reported various components of job satisfaction, the first and most dominant of which is the satisfaction derived from working with students and seeing some observable progress in student learning that they have supported:

“I have always enjoyed my work as a teacher and taken great pride in my growth as a professional. I still enjoy working with students, helping them learn about learning and about themselves. It took a few years to gain a balance between discipline and being able to enjoy the students, but it worked out over the years. My growth as a professional has been steady since my first days as a teacher. Whenever my students weren’t learning I would search for a better way to teach. Over the years I have gained many methods and strategies. I have discarded some, retained some and modified many. I feel tremendously blessed to have had a career as a teacher.”

“The smiles in my students’ faces when the light goes on….watching my struggling students leave after a successful lesson or session….being invited to my former students’ graduation, year after year and watching them cross the stage with tremendous pride….knowing that I have made a difference in many young lives.”

“Seeing the look on a child’s face, a child who thinks he is stupid, or can’t learn school things, when that child realizes they clearly understand an idea, concept or skill. When you can see the light bulb go on when they have learned something, when they know they can learn and understand.”

However, some respondents also stated that there are significant issues that make their work difficult and stressful. For some, the high number of meetings and extensive paperwork impact negatively on time they have available to students:

“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!”

For others, provincial government decisions—perceived as downloading responsibility and withholding resources—directly and negatively affect work, time, and stress levels:

“I consider the downloading of responsibility from the provincial government without adequate resources to be incredibly frustrating and stressful. I want to be the best and most effective teacher I can be yet I am constantly bombarded by demands that I take on jobs/tasks/responsibilities that take me away from teaching or eat into my private time. We need to get back to a place where schools are
places run by professionals who make decisions based on the best interests of teachers and learners not the image of the government du jour.”

One respondent captured the sense of stress in almost the same way as it has been analyzed in the BCTF worklife report dealing with responses to job satisfaction and stress\(^6\). The respondent argued that stress is created because of the constant multi-tasking and juggling of demands, so that when one issue causes stress, other demanding work areas are still present and requiring attention:

“When you try to break down the elements of stress in the profession of teaching it actually does a disservice to teachers. It’s not the individual items that cause stress, it’s the combination of things which actually causes stress. When we have our most stressful times, during report card preparation, we also have all the other items to contend with at the same time. We can’t put the kids on automatic and the meetings don’t stop; there’s still marking and planning; we still need to deal with behaviour issues and call parents, we still have the administration to deal with and the very real problems of kids not getting what they need at school and at home. This is when our stress levels are at their highest, and still we can’t use PD for writing report cards. Some districts have report card writing days where TOCs cover classes for the teacher.”

For others working in Special Education/Learning Assistance, finding work/life balance is difficult, and in some cases teachers choose to work part-time, as fuller employment is too stressful:

“I’ve chosen to work three days a week, because I found working full-time ate into every moment of my life. I watch full-time teachers who are on the verge of having to take stress leave and wonder why they don’t work part-time. But it’s because a full-time job should be only a full-time job. And some districts don’t allow people to work part-time. I’d like to add more, but my doctor said I need to de-stress my life and part of that is considering leaving teaching. Don’t get me wrong, I really love teaching, but the class composition is too draining on my time and energy. I have a family at home that needs my time and energy, and after a work day I feel like I’m not able to give them that.”

There is evidence from a BCTF study of secondary English teachers (Naylor and Malcolmson, 2001)\(^7\) that some teachers, more likely to be female than male, opt to work part-time in order to reduce stress, a finding that appears to be confirmed by the above quote. Data from a more recent report (Naylor and Vint, 2009)\(^8\) which examined the prevalence of stress among BC teachers, also identified women aged between 35 and 44 as being at higher risk of stress-related illness. These data add to the case being developed from a range of data in this study that the BCTF should consider refocusing some attention on gender issues when addressing teachers’ working conditions.

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\(^6\) See Chapter 5, *BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work: A qualitative study*.  
\(^7\) "I love teaching English, but...." A study of the workload of English teachers in BC secondary grades.  
\(^8\) The prevalence of stress-related disorders in BC school districts,  
Work/life balance, where one is able to meet both career and family commitments to one’s satisfaction, is distressingly absent for many people in modern society, whether or not they are teachers:

   Stress and work/life conflict are intertwined, and the latter has been documented as both a cause and an outcome of job stress. Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of demanding work. Job stress is increasingly recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity. (Lowe, 2006, p. 6)

The issue of teachers’ work/life balance arguably requires a new focus by union, employers, and government; and evidence from this study suggests that the work of those with teaching roles in Special Education should be a consideration within such a focus.

The perspectives of all respondents on issues related to inclusive education

This section of the report moves away from the work and perspectives of Special Education and Learning Assistance teachers to consider data from all respondents in terms of areas linked to inclusive education.

As described above, 47 factors were presented in the worklife survey as potential sources of work-related stress. In the classroom/school grouping (Chart 1), the factor that respondents identified as the highest single cause of stress in their work is class composition issues, with a mean rating of 3.94 (1=very low stress, 5=very high stress). Barely 8% of all respondents indicated that class composition is a source of a low or very low level of stress for them. Another high-stress area here that is linked to inclusive education is inadequate access to specialist teachers. Several other factors may link to special needs—in particular the unmet needs of students and possibly class size. There is a clear connection between several of the stress factors listed in Charts 1 and 2 and inclusive education, yet it is also clear that respondents are reacting to what they see as unresolved issues in terms of class composition and lack of support to meet the needs of students that cause stress, rather than either the concept of inclusion or the students themselves.
When asked more specifically about teacher stress induced by perceived level of support for students (Chart 2), it is clear from the data that teachers identified the level of support for students with behavioural problems to be the most significant stress factor, with 508 respondents indicating that this is linked to their experiencing stress, and that the stress level is high, with a mean of 3.97. A close second (3.87), and mirroring data from the specialist teachers (Table 4), is level of support for non-designated, “grey area” students, with a high number of respondents (492) indicating this area of unmet student need was a source of high teacher stress.

The factor ranked third in terms stress is concern with the level of support for inclusion of students with special needs, with 411 respondents indicating this issue to be a source of high stress, and with a mean rating of 3.53 on the 1 to 5 scale.

These three results reflect considerably higher levels of teacher stress associated with the level of support for unmet student needs than with issues such as job security (Table 4).
Chapter 8: Inclusive education: The work of learning specialist teachers

Just as respondents have indicated that their greatest source of satisfaction is their work and relationships with students\(^9\), so, too, they indicate that their higher levels of stress are related to working with students whose needs are not being met. The high level of stress attributed by respondents to the unmet needs of undesignated students may be linked to the de-targeting of funding for such students, and the major reductions in Learning Assistance services, since 2002. In the 2002 BCTF study of Special Education issues in two school districts\(^10\), one of the key findings was that:

- substantially fewer students are being designated in high incidence categories (8% fewer across the province), with corresponding reduction in services in many instances. (Key findings, box 12)

These findings are confirmed by Ministry of Education data reported by the BCTF (2009)\(^11\) that show substantial declines in the numbers of students designated in the following categories between 2004–05 and 2008–09:

- Gifted: 4,748 fewer students designated
- Moderate behavior support or mental illness: 2,673 fewer students designated
- Mild intellectual disability: 574 fewer students designated

Years after teachers identified reduced high-incidence designations, such reductions are confirmed by ministry data. It is important to note that while designations may have decreased, the prevalence of students with specific abilities/disabilities has not. Many districts simply choose not to identify students in categories when no funding support is available. Through the data collected by this survey, teachers are reporting major concerns linked to the failure to meet the needs of students either designated in high incidence categories, or not designated but having observable needs. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the initial government actions, and the cuts since 2002, have resulted in reduced designations in a number of categories, and that these

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\(^9\) See Chapter 5, BC teachers talk about satisfaction and stress in their work: A qualitative study.


reductions, along with Learning Assistance staffing cuts have subsequently reduced services to a significant number of students who were once more likely to have received them when both designations and staffing levels were higher.

Chart 3 shows levels of stress from professional relationships in schools. While these levels appear low, they can also be somewhat deceptive. As an example, one area which may be worth further exploration concerns professional relationships between teachers and education assistants (EAs). While 55.4% of respondents indicated low or very low stress from such relationships, 17% reported such relationships as resulting in high or very high stress, with another 27.7% reporting moderate stress. Thus almost 45% of respondents are experiencing moderate or higher stress because of their interaction with education assistants. However, such stress in professional relationships is not limited to teachers and EAs, and as seen in Chart 3, teacher-EA relationships may be better than those between teachers and Administrative Officers, parents, students, and other teachers.

![Chart 3: Mean level of stress–Professional relationships with...](chart.png)

While these mean scores do not indicate high stress levels generally, the data, once broken down, indicate that there may be sizeable minorities who identify high or very high stress levels linked to professional relationships. The BCTF and CUPE have recently updated the publication *Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants/Education Assistants* (2009)\(^2\), which is one way that both unions are taking a pro-active approach to building good professional relationships between teachers and education assistants.

**Conclusion**

The data from this survey provide information on the work and perspectives of responding teachers who are in Special Education and Learning Assistance roles. The data also express all respondents’ perspectives on issues linked to inclusion in BC’s public schools. While it’s a mixed picture, the data offer little support for any claim that inclusion in the public schools of BC has advanced in the last decade. Class composition and the unmet needs of students dominate

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\(^2\)[http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/InclusiveEd/RolesAndResponsibilitiesTeachersTAs.pdf](http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/InclusiveEd/RolesAndResponsibilitiesTeachersTAs.pdf)
as stress factors for teachers. Compared to five years ago, job satisfaction is lower and stress is higher for more teachers. The specific issues that cause teachers concern have barely shifted since the BCTF studies of 2001-03. Since that time, significantly reduced designations in many Special Education categories, and major cuts in Special Ed staffing, suggest less systemic support for a policy of inclusion.

While some teachers report considerable satisfaction from their work with students, others report high stress from trying to meet students’ needs with fewer specialist staff, reduced time allocation, and fragmented job descriptions. One concern about the data is the under-representation of responses from newer teachers in Special Education/Learning Assistance roles. Based on many discussions with such teachers in recent years, one might expect even more negative reactions had they been better represented in the survey returns.

There is also the likelihood that Special Education and Learning Assistance will face a new round of major cuts in the 2010–11 school year, as indicated in the following quote from the “Moms on the Move”¹³ web page, posted January 28, 2010:

> And at a meeting of parents of students with special needs this week, the [Vancouver] Board Chair acknowledged that Special Education was particularly vulnerable to cuts, since staff costs are protected via contracts and class size is now protected by legislation, leaving unprotected services like Special Education as one of the few areas they can cut.

> Virtually every school board in the province is confronting similar choices, given the limited number of unprotected programs, like Special Ed, that they can cut to make up for unfunded provincial costs, since all boards are required by law to balance their budgets regardless of provincial funding shortfalls.

With looming teacher layoffs a near certainty in most school districts, the possibility of Special Education/Learning Assistance once more being the prime target for cuts appears likely in the 2010–11 school year. If further cuts occur in terms of services for Special Education and Learning Assistance, they will further reduce support for inclusion, with fewer students’ needs being met. With a continuing provincial emphasis on accountability linked to narrowly defined achievement, a systemic focus on meeting the needs of all students through inclusive educational approaches has received less attention in recent years. The provincial policy of inclusion co-exists with severe and disproportionate cuts to Special Education and Learning Assistance staffing that reduce the likelihood of effective and sustainable inclusion.

This report has provided data from both learning specialists and classroom teachers which indicate considerable concerns with the levels of support for inclusion. Our analysis of their perspectives in the context of other data, including reduced specialist support, argues that both funding and systemic supports for effective inclusion are inadequate. As teachers’ desire and capacity to effectively include all students in meaningful learning is constrained by limited resources and deteriorating levels of support, it may be reasonable to question why an inclusionary policy can be mandated without either the means or the will to implement such policy effectively.

References


CHAPTER 9:

Teachers’ priority areas for BCTF bargaining and advocacy

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Senior Research Analyst, BCTF Research

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.
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Introduction

One objective of the Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey was to assess on which working and learning conditions teachers would most like to see the BCTF focus its efforts in terms of bargaining, lobbying the provincial government, and other forms of advocacy.

The Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey concluded with the question: “Which areas of your work should the BCTF focus on to improve your working and learning conditions?” The survey listed 13 potential areas of focus for improving working and learning conditions, asking teachers to rate the level of importance of each of these areas, on a scale where 1=not at all important and 5=very important.

Teachers’ priority areas for improving working and learning conditions

The results show that teachers rate learning conditions as the highest priority for the BCTF to focus on, followed by improving salary and benefits. Chart 1 shows the percentage of respondents ranking each focus area as quite important or very important, and the combined total. The five most important areas of focus are improve support for Special Education (72.2%), reduce class sizes (69.6%), more time for planning and preparation (69.4%), improve salary (61.3%), and improve and expand benefits (60.9%). Roughly half of responding teachers rate most other areas of focus as quite or very important except for improve opportunities for professional development, where only 27.1% do so.

Other suggestions made by teachers

The questionnaire provided space for individual teachers to describe other areas of focus in addition to those listed. Suggestions included improving conditions in school libraries, more support for teacher mentorship, improving working conditions for teachers teaching on call (TTOC), more support to address interpersonal issues at work, addressing assessment issues, funding advocacy, and improving the image of teachers in the public and the media. A few teachers suggested provisions or programs to support wellness and work/life balance.
Chart 1: Percentage of teachers rating areas of focus as quite or very important (totals of the two expressed in brackets)

- Improve support for Special Education (n=542): 26.6% (72.2%)
- More time for planning & prep (n=549): 28.2% (69.4%)
- Reduce class sizes (n=546): 28.6% (69.6%)
- Improve & expand benefits (n=547): 27.6% (60.9%)
- Improve salary (n=548): 28.3% (61.3%)
- Provide programs to support wellness & work/life balance (n=376): 23.4% (54.8%)
- Reduce the range of demands (n=545): 30.8% (54.8%)
- Improve resources (n=541): 30.9% (54.6%)
- Improve support for technology (n=538): 24.9% (48.3%)
- Improve opportunities for collaboration (n=549): 26.2% (46.4%)
- Improve support for ESL (n=340): 27.1% (46.2%)
- Address issues with BCeSIS (n=463): 15.6% (45.8%)
- Improve opportunities for PD (n=550): 15.5% (27.1%)
Differences in priority areas by gender, grades taught, and teaching experience

While it is important to assess overall priorities for teachers in the survey, the data also provide insights into the differing priorities among teacher groups. This section presents the average (mean) level of importance for each area of focus for all survey respondents as well as a comparison of means by gender, grades taught, and years of teaching experience.

Table 1 shows the number of teachers who answered each item and the mean (average) score for each area of focus, listed in the order of importance based on teacher responses. The five most important areas for the BCTF to focus on to improve working and learning conditions are: improve support for Special Education (4.04), more time for planning and preparation (3.98), reduce class sizes (3.94), improve salary (3.80), and improve and expand benefits (3.78).

Table 1: Mean (average) level of importance for each strategy to improve working and learning conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues for BCTF to focus on to improve working and learning conditions</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Mean level of importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for Special Education</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for planning and prep</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce class sizes</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and expand benefits</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve resources (e.g., books, computers)</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the range of demands (e.g., daily physical activity)</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for technology (e.g., BC enterprise Student Information System (BCeSIS), Individual Education Plans (IEPs), reporting formats, etc.)</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for English as a Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address issues with BCeSIS</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 2 to 4 on the following pages examine how priorities differ with respect to gender, grades taught, and years of teaching experience, by comparing the mean scores for each area of focus, by group.
Gender

A comparison of means by gender reveals differences in the importance placed on various areas of focus (Table 2). Female teachers rate all areas of focus at a higher level of importance (on average) than do male teachers, except for improve salary and improve and expand benefits, which male teachers rate slightly higher.

Four areas of focus that female teachers rate, on average, noticeably higher in importance than male teachers include improve support for Special Education, improve support for ESL, improve support for technology, and address issues with BCeSIS.

Table 2: Gender—Areas of focus to improve working and learning conditions (mean score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of focus</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for Special Education</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for planning and prep</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce class sizes</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and expand benefits</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve resources (e.g., books, computers)</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the range of demands (e.g., daily physical activity)</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for technology (e.g., BCeSIS, IEPs, reporting formats, etc.)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for ESL</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address issues with BCeSIS</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary and secondary teachers

Some of the gender differences in priorities may be due to the concentration of female teachers in elementary grades and male teachers in secondary grades. Table 3 shows that secondary teachers do rate improve salary and improve and expand benefits higher than elementary teachers, suggesting these factors are related to gender. However, unlike the gender comparison, there are three areas that secondary teachers rate higher in importance (on average) than elementary teachers. These include more time for planning and prep, address issues with BCeSIS, and provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance.

Table 3: Grades taught—Areas of focus to improve working and learning conditions (mean score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of focus</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for Special Education</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for planning and prep</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce class sizes</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and expand benefits</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve resources (e.g., books, computers)</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the range of demands (e.g., daily physical activity)</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for technology (e.g., BCeSIS, IEPs, reporting formats, etc.)</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for ESL</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address issues with BCeSIS</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Numbers too small for comparisons for teachers in combined K–7 and 8–12 grades (n=45 teachers).
Years of teaching experience

It is reasonable to expect that priorities may differ between the least-experienced and the most-experienced teachers. Table 4 shows the mean level of importance for each strategy by years of teaching experience. There is some variation in the importance assigned to each area of focus, especially between the least- and most-experienced teachers.

Teachers with less than 10 years’ experience, on average, rate the importance of improve resources (e.g., books, computers) and improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers somewhat higher than teachers with 20 or more years’ experience.

Newer teachers rate technology concerns as less important than their more-experienced peers. The mean score for improve support for technology (e.g., BCeSIS, IEPs, reporting formats, etc.) increases with years of teaching experience, as does address issues with BCeSIS.

Mid-career teachers assign a somewhat lower priority to improve salary and improve and expand benefits compared to the least- and most-experienced teachers. Teachers with 20 or more years’ experience assign a higher priority to provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance compared to the least-experienced and mid-career teachers.

Table 4: Years of teaching experience—Areas of focus to improve working and learning conditions (mean score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of focus</th>
<th>Less than 10 years</th>
<th>10 to 19 years</th>
<th>20 or more years</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for Special Education</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for planning and prep</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce class sizes</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and expand benefits</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve resources (e.g., books, computers)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the range of demands (e.g., daily physical activity)</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for technology (e.g., BCeSIS, IEPs, reporting formats, etc.)</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address issues with BCeSIS</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Most important areas of focus

The survey results provide useful information for the BCTF regarding teachers’ priorities for collective bargaining and advocacy efforts. The five most important areas of focus (in order of importance) are improved support for Special Education, more time for planning and preparation, reduced class size, and improvements in salary and benefits. At least 60% of teachers in the survey ranked these areas of focus as quite important or very important.

Differences in priorities by gender, grades taught, and experience

Priorities differ among teacher groups. Female teachers (on average) rate all areas of focus except for improving salary and benefits as more important than male teachers do. Secondary teachers assign a higher priority to providing more time for planning and prep, addressing issues with BCeSIS, programs to support wellness and work/life balance, and improving salaries and benefits. Elementary teachers rate the importance of improving support for Special Education and ESL students considerably higher than secondary teachers do. Teachers with less than ten years’ experience assign higher importance to improving resources (e.g., books, computers) and opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers. Newer teachers rate technology concerns as less important than their more-experienced peers do.
CHAPTER 10: Implications and discussion

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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.
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Chapter 10: Implications and discussion

Introduction

Surveys of the kind developed for this study are designed to generate data which provide a better understanding of teachers’ working lives. When they are conducted by a teacher union there is an implicit assumption that some areas of concern to teachers will be addressed by the union, whether through bargaining or in some other way. What better understanding do the data generate, and how might the union advocate for its members?

New teachers

In terms of the survey sample, the survey reached fewer new teachers (less than five years experience) than might have been expected, with the result that there is less than ideal information about this group of teachers’ work and perspectives. The study findings do provide some insights into issues and concerns specific to new teachers. For example, job instability was raised as an issue by less-experienced teachers who encounter frequent changes in teaching assignments and/or schools, making it difficult to plan in the face of uncertainty. The survey findings also suggest that teachers with less than five years’ experience, or who are less than 35 years of age, or who work as a teacher teaching on call (TTOC), experience very high stress levels associated with job insecurity.

Much work remains to be done to document the needs of new teachers. The BCTF may need to consider whether the low representation is by chance or whether fewer new teachers are prepared to answer surveys, possibly because of other time pressures. Either way, it may be important for the BCTF to find ways to better understand newer teachers’ perspectives on their work.

Gender differences

Gender differences are apparent in a number of areas, including female teachers’ over-representation in part-time employment, and in possible financial and family commitment barriers to graduate studies. Most of the part-time teachers in the survey are female, and over half work part-time for personal reasons. One in five part-time teachers in the survey chose to work in part-time employment as a way to cope with workload, effectively using their own unpaid time for marking and preparation. This is consistent with the findings of the previous 2001 worklife study conducted by BCTF Research. Teachers on leave are more likely to be female and between 35 to 44 years of age compared to the overall sample. There is also a gender difference in the level of importance respondents attributed to strategies for improving working and learning conditions. Male teachers placed a higher level of importance on improving salary and benefits whereas female teachers placed more importance on improving learning conditions such as class size and composition.

A tentative conclusion may be that many women still take primary responsibility for families, and this is reflected in more women working part-time and/or facing difficulties in managing graduate studies and family commitments. With the increased feminization of teaching, gender issues may have been under-studied and may require more in-depth attention. If the BCTF membership is increasingly female, then issues affecting women teachers’ work is an appropriate focus for the union, but arguably one which is minimally addressed at this time.
Professional development

There are clear issues and implications in terms of teachers’ professional development, with minimal PD funding available to many teachers, some evidence of both positive and negative influences at school and district administrative levels, and a difference in values between those who see PD as consumers, looking through and choosing from a list of options, and those teachers who are exercising autonomy in ways that create professional development, often in collaboration with peers. There also appears to be significant support for mentoring of new teachers, an area where BC lags behind provinces such as Ontario\(^1\), which has a provincial program to support induction and mentoring. The data from this survey are not conclusive but may be useful in generating more debate among teachers and within the union in terms of what forms of professional development might be developed and how they might be supported by the union.

Job satisfaction and stress

In a departure from previous research, this study explores what makes teachers satisfied in their work. Earlier studies tended to focus on stressors and did not elicit information on satisfaction in work. Responses show that many teachers clearly love teaching and gain immense satisfaction from a vocation which they see as instrumental in developing children’s learning and development. The study’s findings confirm that teacher-student relationships and interactions are the primary causes of satisfaction; yet other positive interactions with peers and parents, and some level of autonomy are also important factors which contribute to teacher satisfaction.

On the converse side, it almost always appears that it is a combination of factors that stress teachers, such as multi-tasking with limited time to manage all the tasks, complex classrooms, lack of support for problematic student behavior, and stress in professional relationships. Looking at satisfaction and stress data, it may be possible to better understand the primacy of the teacher-student relationship and to work towards conditions that preserve and enhance it.

It may also be possible to better understand that combined factors of stress are what produce the most stress and that while some stress is almost always apparent in teachers’ work, certain combinations may have severe consequences for teachers. This suggests that strategies to reduce teacher stress need to be part of a more comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses the combination of factors that most contribute to teacher stress.

The survey findings provide evidence that working and learning conditions have deteriorated over the last five years. At least two-thirds of the teachers surveyed said their stress level and workload have increased compared to five years ago and four out of ten reported decreased job satisfaction. The analysis reveals few demographic differences among teacher groups, suggesting that increased workload and stress over the last five years are pervasive. Thus, strategies to reduce workload and stress would be of benefit to teachers across the board.

Perhaps it is time for some new approaches to recognizing where and why satisfaction occurs in order to build more of it for the benefit of teachers and students. For individuals, schools, unions, and districts, an awareness of the negative impact of these combinations may also be of utility in addressing individual issues or combinations of factors which cause stress. Opening up more

\(^1\) http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/induction.html
conversations on the positive and the problematic in teachers’ work may engage teachers, employers, and unions in better and more collaborative ways to take positive control, and to better manage professional relationships and work.

**Workload and stress**

In terms of workload, this study reaffirms a range of research indicating that teachers’ workload is a significant issue. The data from this study provide information about long hours worked in and out of school, complex roles, and significant communication/administrative tasks, all of which have been recorded in earlier BCTF and other research. Of a possible 47 sources of stress, teachers rated the level of support for students with disruptive behavior; class composition issues; lack of support for non-designated, “grey area” students; and the unmet needs of students as the 4 most significant sources of stress. The data suggest that teachers view their working conditions as fundamentally linked to the conditions that support student learning, and that they want to see improvements to working conditions that give students better chances of success. One key set of evidence for this claim is that while pay and benefits are stressed by many teachers as directions they want the union to pursue, respondents placed addressing working conditions linked to student learning as slightly higher priorities than their own pay and benefits.

The study also outlines some of the systemic factors creating problematic teacher workloads, with budget shortfalls forcing districts to reduce teaching positions and thereby increase teachers’ workload. While student enrolment declined across Canada between 2001–02 and 2007–08, most provinces increased the number of educators in public education with an overall increase of 9.8% for Canada. BC did the opposite, decreasing the number of educators by 7.8%, many of whom were teachers. In some specialist teacher areas (Special Education/Learning Assistance, library services, English as a Second Language, etc.), the cuts in such positions have been even more severe (Table 1).

**Table 1: Loss of specialist teachers—2001–02 to 2009–10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty program</th>
<th>2001–02</th>
<th>2007–08</th>
<th>2009–10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library Services</td>
<td>921.79</td>
<td>729.96</td>
<td>685.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>990.92</td>
<td>915.80</td>
<td>909.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>4,051.47</td>
<td>3,446.50</td>
<td>3,403.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>1,015.60</td>
<td>791.17</td>
<td>786.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Education</td>
<td>205.89</td>
<td>190.88</td>
<td>185.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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2 Statistics Canada defines educators as “all employees in the public school system (either school-based or district-based) who belong to one of the three following categories: teachers, school administrators, and pedagogical support.”

Work/life balance

While data from this study show that teachers have clearly welcomed work/life balance initiatives to address stress and coping issues, the evidence from a range of provincial data indicates that the causes of workload increases are systemic, with provincial policies and funding drastically reducing teaching positions, thereby both increasing workload and reducing support from specialist teachers. With potentially severe cuts expected in the 2010–11 school year, the implications are problematic for an education system in which teacher workload is already a significant issue. The survey results indicate that excessive workloads contribute to teachers being on medical leave. About half of the teachers on leave in the survey indicated workload issues contributed to their decision to take a leave. Teachers for whom workload issues were a factor were much more likely to be on a stress-related illness/disability compared to other teachers on leave.

Evidence from the BCTF’s Salary Indemnity Program (SIP) shows that 43% of SIP claims, and 47% of costs, are stress-related; that women are over-represented in claim numbers; and that 60% of SIP costs are linked to teachers aged 50 or older. If workload increases and specialist support decreases as a likely consequence of cuts in teaching positions in the 2010–11 year and beyond, there may be increased stress-related claims in the coming years.

Workload and work/life balance should not just be a union issue but should be of concern in a society where the human and economic costs are widely impacting individuals, families, employers, health-care systems, and all taxpayers. There exists considerable evidence that mental health issues are becoming increasingly prevalent in Canada and across a range of occupations, and that many cases of depression are linked to work-related experiences. Hreceniuk (2008) states:

> With costs of between 4 and 12 percent of payroll, depression is Canada's fastest growing disability. The mental health claims of depression, anxiety, and stress are the leading causes of short- and long-term disability.

Within the data on depression and stress, there is also international evidence that those public sector occupations that are relationship-based (education, health, and social services) have higher prevalence of stress-related illnesses:

> In terms of how stress links to occupation, the European Foundation (2005) identified education, health, and social services as the work classifications of highest stress. The UK Health and Safety Executive reported that those employed in education were second only to public administration workers in terms of days estimated days off caused by stress. In Canada, COMPAS Inc. (2006) stated that “the majority of (Ontario) teachers reported being really stressed at work on a frequent basis” (p. 10). Also in Ontario, 94% of Ontario English Catholic Teacher Association members stated that overworking was negatively impacting their personal, family, and social lives (Matsui, 2006). These studies reflect data from a range of Canadian and international studies (Naylor & Schaefer, 2003; Timms, Graham, & Caltabiano, 2006; Wilson, 2002) that indicate high levels of teacher stress. (Naylor, 2008, p. 2)

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4 The prevalence of stress-related disorders in BC school districts.
The contribution of this and other studies may be to argue that a wider view of managing work/life balance is required. At this time, most work/life balance programs encourage individuals to develop coping strategies. While such strategies are useful, they may ignore those systemic factors which cause stress and which are outside of individual control. Stress is a societal issue and it costs society dearly, and so the focus on individual strategies should be balanced with an increased focus on systemic factors such as provincial funding and policies which create the stress factors throughout the system.

Yet there is little evidence that many governments are even aware of the issue, let alone pro-actively addressing it. Indeed, the evidence of inadequate funding resulting in cuts to teacher numbers (beyond what reflects reduced student numbers) actually exacerbates workload issues, and likely increases the incidence of stress-related illness. If stress and imbalance are in part caused by systemic factors, then the way to address them is also systemic, requiring governments to consider this and many other studies, including those from corporate Canada and the World Health Organization. The debate on balance in work and life needs to consider how to create more manageable work in ways that benefit society as a whole by making citizens healthier and more productive while also aiming to reduce costs in areas like prescription drug use and rehabilitation.

One of the problems in addressing issues raised in teacher union research about teacher workload is the external perception of vested interest—that the data and analysis support pre-existing union stances and positions to improve teachers’ working conditions. Yet there are two compelling reasons for engaging unions, employers, and government in a wider discussion and analysis of teacher workload issues. The first is already evident in a plethora of research—that the social and economic costs of work-related stress are huge and unsustainable. The second is that high teacher workload and stress is likely to negatively impact students’ academic and social development.

For both these reasons, a consideration of workload and stress is required, as argued in an earlier paper5:

While the issue of stress-related illness is complex, the paucity of prevention measures at federal and provincial government levels reflects an apathy which should be challenged. Instead of individuals and society paying huge costs as consequences of stress, the factors causing stress could be addressed by reducing workloads, providing incentives for early retirement, and supporting a variety of work/life balance options, including four-day weeks, flexible schedules, and telecommuting. Other approaches more appropriate to teachers’ work should also be considered. There needs to be an explicit focus on gender and solutions found to support women, who are over-represented in stress-related illnesses. (Naylor, 2008, p. 6)

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5 The rising tide of stress in Canada: Time for governments to act in support of schools and society. [http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Publications/Research_reports/2008WLC03.pdf](http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Publications/Research_reports/2008WLC03.pdf)
Teacher retention issues

Increased workload and stress, and loss of job satisfaction not only have implications for students in the classroom and for teachers’ work-life quality, but will likely affect teacher retention in future years. This survey found that one in five teachers is considering leaving the profession, with mid-career teachers the most likely to do so. Increased workload, stress and burnout, health conditions aggravated by stress, lack of encouragement, job insecurity, and dissatisfaction with the provincial and district governance are all contributing factors for surveyed teachers considering such a decision.

The impact of teacher stress on student learning

Other empirical studies have shown that excessive teacher workloads and problematic conditions in classrooms cause teacher burnout and negatively impact students’ learning. Leithwood (2006) states:

There is good evidence to show that teachers’ working conditions matter because they have a direct effect on teachers’ thoughts and feelings—their sense of individual professional efficacy, of collective professional efficacy, of job satisfaction; their organizational commitment, levels of stress and burnout, morale, engagement in the school or profession; and their pedagogical content knowledge. These internal states are an important factor in what teachers do and have a direct effect on what happens in the classroom, how well students achieve, and their experiences of school. “Teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions.” Working conditions matter! (pp. 88-89)

One option may be for the BCTF to explicitly connect teachers’ working conditions and students’ learning conditions in future communications with parents, in the media, and in bargaining. Such connections have been made before, but with evidence of increased workload and stress, the time may be right for a focus on why high teacher workload and stress negatively impact students’ learning and educational experiences.

Priority areas for BCTF focus

The survey results point to two explicit areas where the union might advocate for change and improvements: the first stresses several “working conditions” areas (improve support for Special Education, more planning/prep time, and smaller class sizes), while the second stresses improvements to salary and benefits. In addition to the areas suggested by respondents, there are other potential areas for BCTF action and advocacy, which might include building a case for offering more early retirements, an increased focus on addressing a number of issues faced by women teachers, and exploring ways of reducing workload.

A final suggestion may be to explore the needs of newer teachers, beyond what was learned in this report. How do newer teachers view and engage with their union? What might the needs be for improved and systemic induction and mentoring across the province? Might different forms...
of communication need to be developed by the union in order to better connect with new teachers?

The research team welcomes any comments, questions about this research, or any suggestions for additional links. We can be contacted at: researchteam@bctf.ca.

References


Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey

The survey will take approximately 30–40 minutes to complete; it consists of four sections:

**Section A: Background information**
Demographics, Leaves and illness, Type of contract, Enrolling and non-enrolling subject/work area(s), Grade(s) taught, Education and Professional Development

**Section B: Workload issues**
Hours worked, Report cards, Summer break

**Section C: Views on working conditions and sources of stress**
Work-related stress, Job satisfaction, Changes over the past five years

**Section D: Effects of stress and possible solutions**

Please contact the BCTF Research Department if you have any questions about the survey: Anne Field, 604-871-2251, 1-800-663-9163, afield@bctf.ca.

**Note:** if you are a teacher on leave for all or part of this school year, please complete the survey based on your most recent school experience. Thank you.
SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This information will help us to compare differences between groups of teachers.

**Demographics**

1. Gender
   - □ Female
   - □ Male

2. In what age category are you?
   - □ under 25
   - □ 25–34
   - □ 35–44
   - □ 45–54
   - □ 55 and over

3. In which school district do you most often teach/work this school year?
   - SD# ______
   - complete SD name (not initials) _____________________________________________

4. In your view, does your school/workplace mainly serve a socio-economic environment considered:
   - □ low
   - □ middle
   - □ high
   - □ mixed

5. By the end of this school year, for how many years will you have been teaching?
   - □ less than 1 year
   - □ 1–4 years
   - □ 5–9 years
   - □ 10–14 years
   - □ 15–19 years
   - □ 20–24 years
   - □ 25+ years

6. Please indicate which of the following applies to you:
   - □ I teach in one school/workplace
   - □ I teach in more than one school/workplace
Leaves and illness

7. a. Are you on leave?
   - Yes
   - No (go to Q.8)

If YES
   b. Did workload issues contribute to your decision to take a leave?
      - Yes
      - No

AND
   c. Please indicate the type of leave you are on:
      - education
      - secondment or other employment
      - unpaid personal leave
      - maternity/parenthood/adoption
      - illness/disability, not directly stress-related
      - illness/disability, stress-related
      - other (please specify) ___________________________________________

8. Please indicate for how many days or months you have been absent in the current school year because of illness or disability. (One month is 20 to 22 working days.)
   - 0 days
   - 1–5 days
   - 6–10 days
   - 11–15 days
   - 16–20 days
   - more than 1 month, but less than 2
   - more than 2 months, but less than 3
   - more than 3 months, but less than 4
   - more than 4 months, but less than 5
   - more than 5 months, but less than 6
Type of contract

9. a. Is your employment contract: (choose one only)
   - full-time continuing
   - full-time term
   - part-time continuing
   - part-time term
   - Teacher Teaching on Call (TTOC)
   - Other (please specify): __________________________________________________

If you are a TEACHER TEACHING ON CALL

b. Please approximate the number of days you have worked in this school year for the period of September through December 2008:
   __________ days

If your contract is PART-TIME, please indicate:

c. the full-time equivalent (FTE) of your part-time contract: ________
   (examples: 0.8 FTE=4 days per week
              0.6 FTE=3 days per week
              0.5 FTE=2.5 days per week (half-time)
              0.4 FTE=2 days per week
              0.2 FTE=1 day per week

AND

d. Which ONE of the following statements best relates to your situation?
   - I prefer to work part-time for personal reasons.
   - I would prefer full-time, or more hours than I currently teach.
   - I chose to reduce my contract as a strategy to cope with workload.
   - I work part-time because of illness/disability, but I am not in a rehabilitation program.
   - I work part-time because I am in a job accommodation or rehabilitation program.
   - Other (please specify): __________________________________________________

e. Has your school district reduced your FTE assignment since 2007–08 (last school year)?
   - Yes: from __________ FTE to __________ FTE.
   - No

f. In addition to your paid part-time teaching assignment, if you work any unpaid time as a teacher, please indicate the average number of unpaid hours per week you are working:
   average unpaid hours worked per week=____________
Enrolling and non-enrolling subject/work area(s)

The following questions relate to the nature of your teaching assignment, whether enrolling or non-enrolling. Please respond to the questions that relate to your teaching assignment.

If you are an **ENROLLING** teacher:

10. a. Do you teach in any of the following **programs**?

-成人教育
-另类教育
-远程教育/分布学习
-法语浸没/程序 cadre

b. Which best describes your teaching area?

- I teach my students the majority of their subjects (most elementary teachers, some middle school teachers, some rural school teachers)

  OR

- I am a subject specialist, and teach/work **all or most of the time** in the following area (choose one):

  - 商务教育
  - 职业和个人规划
  - 英语/语言艺术
  - 法语
  - 地理
  - 历史
  - 家庭经济
  - 技术教育
  - 其他语言
  - 数学
  - 音乐/戏剧/美术
  - 体育
  - 科学
  - 社会研究

  Other (please specify) ____________________________________________
If you are a NON-ENROLLING teacher:

11. a. Please indicate the full-time equivalent (FTE) you spend in any of the following non-enrolling areas (choose all that apply):
   - Special Education only FTE=_______
   - Learning Assistance only FTE=_______
   - Combined role, Sp Ed & LA FTE=_______
   - English as a Second Language FTE=_______
   - Teacher-Librarian FTE=_______
   - Counsellor FTE=_______
   - Aboriginal Education FTE=_______
   - Other (please specify) ____________________________ FTE=_______

   b. In addition to your non-enrolling position, do you also teach in an enrolling position?
      - Yes
      - No

   c. If YES, what is your FTE in this enrolling position?   FTE=__________

All teachers continue here.

Grade(s) taught

12. What grade(s) are you teaching in this school year? Please indicate all that apply.
   - K
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6
   - 7
   - 8
   - 9
   - 10
   - 11
   - 12
   - Adult Ed

13. How many split-grade or multi-grade classes do you teach?
   - None
   - One
   - More than one
Education and Professional Development (PD)

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (choose one)
   - Bachelor’s degree with teacher training program (PDP, etc.)
   - University certificate or diploma above Bachelor level (PB+15, to achieve pay Category 5+)
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctorate
   - Other (please specify): _____________________________________________________

15. Are you currently enrolled in an education program? (choose one)
   - No, not currently enrolled in an education program
   - University certificate or diploma above Bachelor level (PB+15, to achieve pay Category 5+)
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctorate
   - Other (please specify) _____________________________________________________

16. a. Do you plan to enroll in an accredited education program in 2009 or 2010?
   - Yes (go to Q.17)
   - No

If NO,

b. Which of the following reasons apply? (check all that apply)
   - Not interested right now
   - Have already reached desired level of education
   - Family obligations
   - Financial restraints
   - Lack of access to programs
   - Other (please specify): _____________________________________________________

17. During the 2008–09 school year, in which of the following have you participated, and/or do you expect to participate? (check all that apply)
   - School-based professional development
   - District-based professional development
   - PSA (Provincial Specialist Association) days
   - Self-directed professional development
   - Other (please specify): _____________________________________________________
18. Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Professional Development (PD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
<th>somewhat disagree</th>
<th>neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>somewhat agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I generally enjoy participating in school-based PD activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I generally enjoy participating in district PD days and activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to see more PD options available to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have autonomy in terms of choosing PD.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am often directed towards doing particular sessions in PD.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty deciding what I want to do in PD.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Please use this space to add any comments on your perspectives on current PD approaches, or what you would like to see in PD in the future.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

[There is extra space at the back, if you need it for any write-in question.]

20. Mentoring is a way to support newer teachers by linking them with experienced teachers in a supportive, professional relationship. Please indicate your interest in a mentorship program:

☐ I am a newer teacher who would like to receive mentoring.
☐ I am an experienced teacher who would like to offer mentoring.
☐ I am not interested in receiving or offering mentoring.
SECTION B: WORKLOAD ISSUES

These data will help us to identify where workload problems may occur so that the BCTF might advocate for improvements.

Hours worked

We would like to know how long you work each week, and how much of your workload occurs outside of regular school hours.

21. a. Please estimate the total number of hours you work in an average week (all school-related work):
   _______ average total hours worked per week

   b. How many hours per week, on average, do you spend working during the following time periods, to the nearest hour? (check all that apply, and include number of hours)
      - recess and lunch breaks _______ hours
      - before and after school, and evenings _______ hours
      - weekends _______ hours

22. Please indicate how many hours (rounded to the nearest hour) you spend in addition to your regular work day on any of the following work-related tasks in an average week.
   (NB This question excludes report-card writing.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-related tasks</th>
<th>Average hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with students outside of class time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing preparation (all types)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending meetings (all types)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic record-keeping through BCeSIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-related e-mail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other administrative tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund-raising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional learning community or other collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other job-related tasks (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23. Please use this space to add your comments on any significant issues relating to your responses to question 22.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Report cards

24. The last time you did report cards, how many hours, in total, did you spend doing them?

☐ n/a
☐ 1–5 hours
☐ 6–10 hours
☐ 11–15 hours
☐ 16–20 hours
☐ 21–25 hours
☐ 26–30 hours
☐ 30+ hours

25. a. Do you currently use BCeSIS to prepare report cards?

☐ Yes
☐ No

b. If YES, how has this changed the amount of time you spend preparing report cards, compared to pre-BCeSIS reporting?

☐ decreased since using BCeSIS
☐ stayed the same
☐ increased since using BCeSIS

26. Please use this space to add your comments on any significant issues relating to your responses on report cards.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

BCTF Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey
**Summer break**

27. a. During last summer break (2008), how much time did you spend on the following activities? Express your answers in weeks (5 working days = 1 week). If less than a full week, express the time in days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completing year-end tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching summer school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education-related employment other than teaching summer school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment not related to teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking educational courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading educational journals and/or books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the upcoming school year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking district PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other work or work-related activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Please use this space to add your comments on any significant issues relating to your responses on summer break.
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

---

**SECTION C: VIEWS ON WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOURCES OF STRESS**

Research shows that teaching can be stressful. Please help us identify and address sources of stress in teaching.

**Work-related stress**

28. This question lists several factors affecting a teacher’s work experience. For each factor, please indicate whether it is a source of work stress for you (tick no or yes), and if so, circle the level of stress (on a scale of 1 to 5) that you experience.

(see overleaf)
### Source of work-related stress?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of stress</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom/School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of class(es)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class composition issues (e.g., high numbers of ESL/special needs)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split-grade/multi-grade class(es)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOC)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to specialist teachers (ESL, Special Ed, LA)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment: classroom, school</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet needs of students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate learning resources</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of support for students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of students with special needs</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-designated, “grey area” students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disruptive behavior</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students living in poverty</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes, involvement, control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition between schools (e.g., Distributed Learning, academies)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconfiguration of school (e.g., new middle school)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of change in teaching assignment (e.g., different grade level, specialist to regular classroom, different school)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job insecurity/concerns about employment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control over work environment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional autonomy about what and how I teach</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher involvement in decision-making</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued…)

12 BCTF Worklife of BC teachers: 2009 survey
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of work-related stress?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Level of stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative work, reporting, testing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep time</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs – paper</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs – online</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing report cards – non-BCeSIS</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing report cards – BCeSIS</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily physical activity requirement</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial exams – Grade 10</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial exams – Grade 12</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships with:</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officers</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/Education Assistants</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-teaching professionals (e.g., Speech Language Pathologists, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of:</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school board</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The provincial government</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCeSIS</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for using technology in teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for using technology in administrative work</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources of stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
29. Please comment on what you consider to be the most stressful aspect(s) of your work.
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Job satisfaction

Many aspects of teaching employment can be considered sources of satisfaction for a teacher. Some of these include working with students, supporting students outside of class, and collaboration with other educators.

30. Please comment on the most satisfying aspect(s) of your work.
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Changes over the past five years

Some teachers have indicated that their views about teaching as a career have changed over time.

31. a. Have you been teaching in the BC public school system for the past five years?
   - Yes
   - No (go to Q.32)

   If YES,
   b. Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that your **job satisfaction** has:
      - increased
      - decreased
      - stayed the same
      - changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased

c. Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that your **workload** has:
   - increased
   - decreased
   - stayed the same
   - changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased

d. Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that your **stress** level has:
   - increased
   - decreased
   - stayed the same
   - changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased

32. Would you recommend teaching as a career to others?
   - Yes
   - No

33. a. Are you considering leaving teaching for reasons other than retirement?
   - Yes
   - No

   If YES,
   b. what are your reasons?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
### SECTION D: EFFECTS OF STRESS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Knowing the effects of stress and identifying ways to reduce the causes of stress helps the BCTF advocate for improved resources and conditions.

34. The following statements describe possible effects of work stress on personal well-being.

Thinking about the effects of work stress on your life, please circle the number representing how often you experience the following, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=never and 5=all of the time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of work stress</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find keeping up with the demands of my workload as a teacher stressful.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel there are enough hours in the day to meet all of my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that job pressures interfere with my family or personal life.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have energy left at the end of the day, after I have completed my teaching responsibilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty “turning off” thoughts or concerns about work during my personal time...</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my work life and personal life are in good balance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my job is negatively affecting my physical or emotional well-being.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify):

\[1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5\]

Other (please specify):

\[1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5\]

Other (please specify):

\[1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5\]
35. Which areas of your work should the BCTF focus on to improve your working and learning conditions?

Please rate the level of importance of each of the following areas of focus on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=not at all important and 5=very important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of focus</th>
<th>Level of importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce class sizes.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for Special Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for ESL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve resources (e.g., books, computers)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for planning and prep</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the range of demands (e.g., daily physical activity)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for Professional Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for collaboration and sharing with peers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve support for technology (e.g., BCeSIS, IEPs, reporting formats, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address issues with BCeSIS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve and expand benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs to support wellness and work/life balance</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Other (please specify):</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
36. Please use this space to provide any other comments you would like to share regarding working and learning conditions.

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Please return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by March 27, 2009.
A report of the findings will be produced and placed on the BCTF website.
Extra writing space; please include the question number(s) with your comments.
The worklives of Canadian teachers: A summary of recent literature

The following reports represent our selection of Canadian research into teachers’ worklives since 2001, and are intended to provide some context for the BCTF Research study, *The Worklife of BC Teachers in 2009*.

Canadian research


The Manitoba Teachers’ Society Task Force on Teacher Workload was created in June 2008 and investigated the issue of teacher workload in Manitoba by consulting with MTS members through focus groups, a workload survey, presentations on workload to members, member polling, and the solicitation of member comments. According to the survey, 52% of teachers in Manitoba experienced an increase in workload in the 2008–2009 school year over the previous year. Furthermore, 70% of respondents reported negative health impacts as a result of teaching, and 73% found that stress affected their job performance. The top concerns of Manitoba teachers were found to be class size and composition, technology, prep time, provincial/divisional demands, and extra-curricular activities.


Data from three surveys inform much of the data in this hard-copy publication (a 2008 version of this—*Shaping Our Future*—can be found on the ATA web site). They are the Member Opinion survey, Professional Development survey and the Beginning Teachers’ survey. Class size and composition issues were reported. Some improvements in access to both technology and print/text resources were described by Alberta teachers. Teachers in Alberta reported working 53 hours a week, and while over 80% considered teaching satisfying, only one-third would recommend teaching as a career. 40% of teachers said they had difficulty balancing personal and work life, and about 14% reported bouts of depression. The report includes a significant section on new teachers, an under-reported group in Canada.


In undertaking this project, the ETFO sought to speak directly to elementary school teachers in Toronto to hear their “unvarnished point of view” on the issues, trends, stresses, and challenges they face in their work. While elementary school teachers seemed to be generally positive about their work and driven by a strong sense of vocational purpose, they also reported a number of areas of frustration. The negative factors undermining teachers’ abilities to create and maintain rich learning environments include ever-increasing paperwork, large classes, inadequate resources to serve increasing numbers of special needs students, and unrealistic curriculum requirements. For some teachers, this has resulted in reduced morale and job satisfaction as they feel increased frustration and loss of control. Focus group participants came up with a number of solutions, including reduced workloads, reduced class sizes, and more specialized staff support and resources across the system.
This article summarizes the findings of various studies on teacher stress and working conditions, with a particular focus on the research of Dr. Lynda Younghusband on high school teachers in Newfoundland. The author finds that teacher organizations worldwide agree that stress has a harmful and negative effect on their members. In general, the causes of this stress are well understood; but effective, well-funded solutions to the problem are more difficult to come by.


Kamanzi, Riopel, and Lessard (2007), in a wide-ranging study of Canadian teachers’ work, explored professional induction and development, social relations in school, work satisfaction, perception of changes on teachers’ work, and perception of the profession of educator. They found that teachers’ work was impacted by decisions made at the provincial level, whether by government or a Ministry of Education. Of teachers who responded to Kamanzi et al.’s survey, 88.6% stated that their workload had increased in recent years. The authors also found that BC and Quebec teachers were more pessimistic about educational change than teachers in other provinces. They reported that most respondents loved teaching, but that barely half of BC teachers felt able to meet the needs of students with special needs.

Manitoba Teachers’ Society. (2007). Manitoba Teachers’ Society Workload Study. Winnipeg: MTS. [Full document not available online]

3,000 Manitoba teachers were surveyed. 50% reported an increase in workload relative to the previous year, with results closely matching the 2005 CTF study. Close to 55% of respondents were working 51 or more hours per week. 92% indicated that they felt ‘overworked’ while 68% said stress affected their job performance. Class size was identified as a major issue for Manitoba teachers, with 51% reporting an increase in class size.


This study reviews an extensive range of Canadian and international literature which linked to eight internal states pertaining to teachers, with the claim that by considering the eight states, analysis of teachers’ work and workload could be considered and proposals for change could be identified. The eight states were:

- sense of individual professional efficacy,
- sense of collective professional efficacy,
- job satisfaction,
- organizational commitment,
- level of stress and burnout,
- morale,
- engagement in the school or profession, and
- pedagogical content knowledge.

Leithwood offers recommendations targeted at teachers, administrators, policy makers, and teacher unions, most aimed at pro-active steps to create and maintain working conditions that matter. One key message is that teachers’ working conditions can be addressed systemically to create a manageable workload.

This report found both high satisfaction and moderately high stress in Ontario’s teachers. Most satisfaction was found in working with students and colleagues while adding to their knowledge of teaching and subject focus. 81% would recommend going into teaching as a career. Stress levels appear consistent across age ranges and gender. Time constraints, parental blame, dealing with children from dysfunctional families, teacher performance appraisals, and school politics were identified (in descending order) as the most stressful aspects of teaching. Respondents were also asked to consider how education had changed over time, with both positive (textbooks, teaching, facilities) and negative (student/parent respect for teachers, student behavior, quality of family life) aspects reported.


James Matsui’s report was based on phone interviews with 1,767 elementary teachers. Average working hours were 54.5 hours per week. Those with the least experience worked the greatest number of hours, and hours worked decreased as experience increased. Over a year, OECTA members worked on average 35 days on weekends, holidays, and vacation days. 88% reported feeling stressed from overwork, and 89% reported negative impacts on their personal lives from overworking, while 80% stated that their physical or mental health has been affected by the amount of time their work demands.

Canadian Teachers’ Federation. (2005). *Canadian Teachers’ Federation National Teachers’ Poll*. Ottawa: CTF. [Full document not available online].

Key findings:

- 83% of Canadian teachers reported that they had a higher workload than in 2001, with 58% indicating a substantial increase in workload. In 2001, 63% of teachers reported an increase in their workload compared to the two years prior.
- Teachers report in 2005 that they work an average of 55.6 hours a week including assigned classroom instruction, course preparation, grading and reporting, individual help to students, meetings, parent interviews, and supervision of students. In the 2001 survey, teachers reported an average work week of 51.8 hours.
- 51% of teachers stated that their class sizes have grown between 2003 and 2005, with only 1 in 10 teachers reporting smaller class sizes.
- 74% of teachers surveyed reported an increase in the number of students with special needs in their class in the past two years.

Written by James Matsui, this study explicitly links teachers’ feelings of being overworked with workload. Increased workload led to frustration as teachers felt it more difficult to meet their own personally-developed standards, and that pressures of work left little space to acquire new skills, to work with individual students and to collaborate with peers. 86% reported that work-related demands had negative effects on their personal and family lives. The main stressors identified by respondents were: numbers of students with special needs in classes, cutbacks in specialist teachers and support staff, and class size. In terms of priorities for action, teachers identified class size, prep time, special needs, and specialist support as the four top priorities to be addressed by their union.


The NSTU carried out this study in response to a 1994 decision by the provincial government to reduce the amount of marking and preparation time allotted to teachers as a means of cutting costs. The Teachers’ Provincial Agreement compels boards to ensure that teachers are given an average of 10% of instructional time for preparation and marking, an amount that the union has consistently asserted to be inadequate. Although the results of the study show that classroom teachers in Manitoba have an average of 11.1% marking and preparation time, 6.8%, or approximately 650 teachers, have no marking and preparation time at all. An additional 24.6%, or nearly 2,400 teachers, have less than 10%. 47% of respondents indicated that they do not feel as though they have enough scheduled time for marking and preparation. The authors conclude that without adequate time for preparation and marking, teachers will be unable to develop optimum learning environments for their students and will suffer from unproductive levels of stress.


This SSHRC-funded project compared Canadian teachers’ work and learning with other Canadian workers. They reported that:

- Canadian teachers are older than the labour force in general, and more likely to be female and white.
- About 20% of teachers are employed part-time. Full-time teachers work at least 45 hours a week.
- Teachers have a very high rate (69%) of involvement in voluntary organizations and have a high rate of unpaid housework of more than 15 hours a week.
- Teachers reported a higher level of participation (90%) in courses and other learning.
- Teachers’ extensive unpaid overtime, their relatively high levels of job stress, and the extent of their volunteer work, should be better understood by the general public.

Reporting a working week of over 52 hours for teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador, Dibbon reported high levels of ‘invisible’ work, much done in teachers’ own time. He states that teachers are “over worked, stressed and frustrated with various aspects of their jobs.” Arguing for increased preparation time, more manageable reporting, and reduced supervision as ways to reduce workload, Dibbon also addresses class size and composition and the rate of educational change in a wide-ranging argument for redesigning teaching to better meet students’ needs while making work manageable.


This report includes data from across Canada concerning:

- Class size/composition,
- Length of the school year and instructional time,
- Assigned non-instructional duties,
- Teachers’ professional development, and
- Provincial teacher unions’ reports on worklife.

Alberta Teachers’ Association. (2002). *Falling Through the Cracks: A Summary of What We Heard About Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta Schools.* Edmonton: ATA. [76 pages]

In May and June 2002, the Alberta Teachers’ Association held over 40 hearings across the province to collect data about teaching and learning conditions in Alberta and received nearly 1,200 submissions from teachers, school staff members, subject specialist groups, school councils, and other education stakeholders. This report reflects the findings of those investigations and is built around six major topics: class size and composition; curriculum change, teaching resources, and professional development; funding issues, urban/rural inequities, and the physical environment; social contexts of teaching and learning; teachers and teaching; and provincial achievement testing. Teachers noted that they faced increasing demands to meet with colleagues and specialists in order to coordinate students’ programs, but at the same time had for a number of years seen a great reduction of preparation time within each school day. They also mentioned an enormous increase in the amount of paperwork that they were required to do, some of which they felt was pointless and which took time away from teaching, preparation and marking.


As a companion piece to the ATA’s *Falling Through the Cracks* report, this paper seeks to shed some light on the underlying causes of the concerns that the report outlines.

Compiled by Charlie Naylor, Research Department, Emily O’Neill and Karen Rojem, BCTF Information Services.