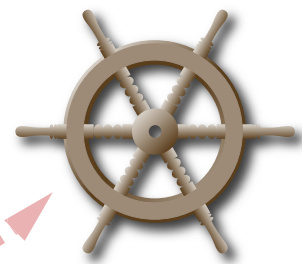


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## Teacher Time Use Survey

by Debbie McIsaac, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

At Annual Council 2014 a resolution was adopted to conduct a study reflecting the current demands on teachers' time in relation to doing work-related tasks each day, both at school and at home. To that end, the NSTU contracted Dr. Kevin Kelloway, Canada Research Chair in Occupational Health Psychology and Dr. Lori Francis, Professor of Psychology at Saint Mary's University to conduct this study. The study involved teachers in the public school system taking part in a 'day reconstruction' study in which they completed a survey detailing the activities of their day in 30-minute blocks. This study was done, in part, to provide data to help strengthen the argument that to provide students with the best possible education, teachers' workload must be manageable and realistic.

Teacher workload issues have, and continue to be the focus of numerous studies across Canada and in many other countries around the world.

A literature review on teacher workload prepared by the Alberta Teachers' Association in 2012, presented several conclusions drawn from the review:

- ◆ Teachers work an average of 50 to 55 hours per week
- ◆ Teachers work 10 to 12 hours per week outside of regular school hours
- ◆ The work of teachers is highly complex and involves a wide range of tasks
- ◆ Students have a wide range of learning needs, and teachers lack the supports and resources necessary to support an increasingly diverse student population
- ◆ The current emphasis on high-stakes testing and accountability increases the amount of time that teachers spend on paperwork, administration, and formal student assessment and reporting

A study contracted by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation in 2012, which focused on better understanding "the complexities and challenges associated with teacher time in Saskatchewan", lead the authors, Drs. Carol Schick and James Ninch, to state:

**The complexity of teachers' time has not been fully appreciated. To date, teacher time has been viewed through a narrow lens resulting in a limited understanding of the political, social and professional environments within, which teachers work. Furthermore, educational trends at the local, national and international levels have put increasing pressure upon teachers. (p. 1)**

Duxbury and Higgins, authors of a study by the Alberta Teachers' Association conducted in 2013 found that teachers work more hours per week than most Canadians and "exhibit high work overload, high work-family conflict and are significantly less likely to have any forms of workplace flexibility."



The Canadian Teachers' Federation conducted an online survey in February and March 2014, on issues related to work-life balance focusing on issues that contribute to work-related stress and work-life balance and factors that contribute to improving teacher work-life balance. Among the key findings it was found that many teachers felt torn between their teaching responsibilities and their responsibilities outside the work place;

stress related to work-life balance has increased over the past five-years; work-life balance is affecting their ability to teach the way they would like to teach; not being able to devote the time they would like to each of their students; class composition and meeting the needs of students with special needs; lack of time for planning with colleagues and marking and grading student work; insufficient resources and lack of preparation time; insufficient time to spend with their own children, spouse or partner and for personal recreational pursuits.

Following in line with the above mentioned studies, the results of the *NSTU Teacher Time Use survey* provides illustrative data on how and when teachers allocate time to various work tasks and how these work experiences affect their well-being. Teachers in this sample worked an average of 52.2 hours/week, with 36 per cent (18.7 hours) of that time occurring outside of school hours. Furthermore, the majority of teachers in this sample were experiencing high levels of workload and work-family conflict. While teachers reported moderate levels of mental well-being, these stressors predict lower levels of mental well-being. A summary of the results of teachers' survey responses are as follows:

### **The teacher survey assessed:**

- ◆ How teachers spend their days both at and outside of work;
- ◆ How much time teachers spend doing work-related tasks both at and outside of work;
- ◆ How much discretion teachers have in scheduling their work-related tasks;
- ◆ How much tension teachers experienced during the time they were completing their work-related tasks;
- ◆ Work experiences and teachers' feelings about their work in general;
- ◆ Teachers' psychological well-being.



From left to right are graduate student Tabitha Thibault, and Drs. Lori Francis and Kevin Kelloway presenting results from the 2015 Nova Scotia Teachers Time Use Study during NSTU's Executive Planning conference on July 2.

### **Time Use**

- ◆ On a daily basis, teachers reported working an average of 10.0 hours, with 7.7 hours being spent at work.
- ◆ Teachers reported working an average of 52.2 hours per week, with 18.7 of those hours being from outside of the regular school time, including their lunch breaks.
- ◆ Approximately half of teachers reported working more than 42 hours per week and another 20 per cent of teachers reported working over 60 hours per week.
- ◆ Teachers spend the majority of their workday engaged in teaching-related activities (i.e. class instruction/teaching, preparation, and marking, as well as extra-curricular activities), specifically, class instruction/teaching (4.9 hours) and preparation (3.9 hours).

### **Feelings about Daily Tasks**

- ◆ Approximately half of teachers reported a lack of discretion in deciding what work-related activity has to be done and when during their day.
- ◆ Approximately half of teachers experience tension while engaging in work-related activities.
- ◆ Approximately half of teachers experience role overload during their daily work-related activities.
- ◆ The majority of teachers reported high levels of role clarity and low levels of role conflict while engaging in work-related activities.

### **Work Experiences**

- ◆ Workload was the most frequently noted stressor (94.2 per cent).
- ◆ Work-family conflict was also a common stressor among teachers (83.5 per cent).
- ◆ Teachers reported good opportunities to use their skills or learn new ones.

### **Individual Mental Well-Being**

- ◆ Teachers self-reported moderate levels of mental well-being.
- ◆ When looking at the relationships among work experiences, time use, and mental health:
  - Workload, work-family conflict, tension during work-related activities, and role overload were associated with poorer psychological health and well-being.
  - Work time, specifically weekly hours worked during the workday, weekly hours worked outside the workday, and time engaged in work-related activities in a day were also associated with poorer mental health.

A similar study conducted in 2010 by Drs. Kelloway and Francis, *Stress and Strain in the Nova Scotia Teachers Union Membership*, indicated that 79.3 per cent of teachers reported high levels of workload and only 37.5 per cent reported high levels of work-family conflict. Compared with the findings in this current study of 94.9 per cent and 83.5 per cent respectively, it is apparent the amount of teachers that reported high levels of workload and work-family conflict has increased over the past five years.

The findings of this time use study can be informative to the NSTU in taking action on behalf of its members around workload and well-being. Having province-wide information in regards to working conditions and stressors will assist in determining where teachers need additional support, guide professional development, direct conversations with government, and contribute to discussions around contractual issues dealing with workload and health benefits.

**NOTE:** The full report is available on the NSTU website under NSTU Publications/ Position Papers and Reports

[From The Teacher, December 2015, Volume 54 Number 3, Page 6 © NSTU 2015]