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2008 Teachers Teaching on Call Working Conditions Survey Summary of the Preliminary Findings

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Background

The Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOC) Working Conditions survey and data analysis were conducted in June 2008 by the BCTF Research Department, in consultation with the TTOC Advisory Committee (TTOCAC). Margaret White, research analyst, and Sharon Wood, then staff co-ordinator of the TTOCAC, presented the preliminary findings at the Summer Conference in Kamloops, British Columbia. This summary provides an overview of the preliminary findings. A final report with a more detailed analysis is forthcoming, and will be published on the BCTF website.

Objectives and survey design

The objective of the survey was to assess the working conditions of teachers teaching on call (TTOC) in British Columbia in 2007–08. Topics addressed in the survey include reasons for working as a TTOC, adequacy of work assignments and income, barriers to obtaining TTOC work, and satisfaction with working conditions. Questions were also included to assess the impact of recommendations made by Vince Ready in the Industrial Inquiry Commission report (2006), and to invite respondents to comment on the working conditions of teachers teaching on call.

To conduct the survey, a sample of teachers teaching on call in British Columbia was drawn from the BCTF membership database. The population was divided into four sampling groups, according to the number of TTOC in the district. Proportionate sampling was used to ensure adequate numbers of TTOC were drawn from rural districts with fewer TTOC.

Participants with a contact e-mail address were informed about the online survey by e-mail (70% of sample) and provided with a link to the survey. The remaining 30% of participants were mailed a survey package. The survey was open to participants who worked or were seeking work as a TTOC in 2007–08. As this information was not available in the membership database, a screening question was included at the start of the questionnaire. Only those who answered “yes” to this question were eligible to complete the survey.

Survey response and characteristics of the sample

Of the 2,608 TTOC who were contacted about the survey, 996 returned a questionnaire. Of these, 837 actively worked as a TTOC in 2007–08. The preliminary results are based on these 837 respondents. The sample is representative of the overall TTOC population, in terms of both number of TTOC in the district, and rural/urban groups based on the rural factor score¹. Each geographic region was well-represented, with 42% living in urban areas, 28% living in suburban areas, and 30% living in rural/remote areas.

All age groups were represented in the survey results, with 40.5% of respondents less than 35 years old, 31.7% between 35 and 54 years, and 27.9% at 55 years of age or older. About three-quarters (76%) of respondents were female, who tended to be concentrated in the younger age groups. The opposite was true for male respondents. While 24% of survey respondents were male, they comprised 38% of respondents aged 55 to 64 years and 48.4% of those 65 and older.

About one-fifth (20.4%) of the sample were retired and working as a TTOC. A higher percentage of male respondents (38.2%) were retired compared to female respondents (15.2%).

Survey results

The majority of teachers teaching on call responding to the survey had either less than one year (19%) or one to three years (48.6%) experience as a TTOC. About one-fifth (21.8%) had worked as a TTOC for six or more years. Seventy percent of respondents worked as a TTOC only, while 22.6% also had a full- or part-time term position. About half (53.9%) of the TTOC responding to the survey were seeking a permanent full-time or part-time teaching position. The other respondents were retired or not seeking a permanent position (20.2%).

The survey revealed a disparity in the amount of TTOC work received. About one-fifth (19.8%) worked more than 110 days, while 27.3% worked 30 or fewer days. On average, respondents worked 70 days of TTOC assignments. While many TTOC were receiving as much work as they wanted, 40.5% said they had less work than they wanted.

The vast majority (78.5%) of TTOC earned less than \$30,000 per year from TTOC assignments in 2007–08. Over one-third (36.2%) reported annual TTOC earnings of less than \$10,000. Almost half (45%) supplemented their TTOC earnings with non-TTOC employment. Taking these additional earnings into account, 53.9% reported total earnings under \$30,000 and 14.1% reported total earnings less than \$10,000. Of the 222 respondents (about one-quarter) with a student loan, 47.3% owed at least \$20,000.

When asked about satisfaction with working conditions, about one-third of respondents were “completely satisfied” with the daily wage (35.8%), amount of TTOC work each week (32.4%), the call-out system (32.3%), being called for work in their area of expertise (31.4%), and work assignments (30.6%). When asked about fairness of work procedures, 12.5% “strongly agreed”

¹ The Ministry of Education assigns a rural factor score to each school district. The TTOC population and the survey responses were categorized into four groups, based on the rural factor score. The percentage of TTOC in each urban/rural grouping for the overall population and the survey respondents was compared. Only minor variations were found.

that hiring procedures for contracts are fair while 29.3% “strongly agreed” that call-out procedures are fair.

The amount of TTOC work, the daily rate, and fairness of hiring procedures were ranked by about 60% of respondents as the first, second, or third most important area, respectively, for developing strategies to improve working conditions for teachers teaching on call. When asked whether they agreed with the statement that “As a TTOC, I sometimes feel I am not treated as a ‘real’ teacher,” 19.4% “strongly agreed” and 38.6% “somewhat agreed.”

The survey also included questions to assess the impact of the Ready recommendations, implemented in 2006, which stipulated that TTOC be paid on scale and accumulate seniority after three continuous days on any assignment. Of the 391 respondents who worked before 2006, 30.7% said they noticed a decrease in being called out on the fourth day, after the Ready recommendations came into effect.

The survey found that the majority of respondents were not aware that the portability of seniority between districts applied to TTOC. Only 36.9% reported being informed about portability provisions. Forty-one respondents were hired as a TTOC in another district after 2006. Of those, 15 reported being credited with seniority.

Giving voice to the concerns of teachers teaching on call

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to provide written comments about the working conditions of teachers teaching on call. The qualitative responses to this question provide rich insights into the experience of TTOC, the issues of most concern to them, and their suggestions for improving working conditions for TTOC.

Adequacy of earnings was an issue for many TTOC. Many reported working two or more jobs to earn sufficient income to pay their bills. The cost of childcare and transportation further eroded their earnings. Some said that the financial uncertainty they faced as a TTOC, combined with the lack of hope of having “a classroom of one’s own,” was pushing them out of the profession. Others were more satisfied with the amount of TTOC work, as it provided them with flexibility to achieve a balance in their work and personal life. Some new TTOC appreciated the opportunity to build resources and ideas and “learn the ropes” as a teacher.

TTOC identified a number of ways in which their daily pay was undermined, such as having hours modified after accepting an assignment, not being paid for prep periods that are part of the regular teaching assignment, and last-minute maneuvering by administrators to reduce hours of TTOC assignments. In terms of the fourth day call-out, some TTOC reported benefiting from being paid on scale, while others reported that their school district was avoiding calling TTOC on the fourth day.

Divergent views were expressed regarding the employment of retired teachers as TTOC. Some respondents expressed resentment toward retired TTOC, feeling that they are crowding younger teachers out of TTOC work, and making it difficult for new TTOC to acquire the teaching experience needed to secure permanent contracts or to earn sufficient income. Retired TTOC expressed feeling undervalued and disappointed about perceived negativity towards them. They felt that retired TTOC brought a wealth of experience to the classroom, and provided continuity

for students. TTOC work also helped them to ease into retirement and to supplement their retirement income.

TTOC in the survey expressed many concerns about the day-to-day working conditions in the school and classroom. Many reported feeling unwelcome in school staffrooms, or not receiving the resources or support needed to set up their classroom at the start of the day. Some TTOC also described the challenges of dealing with negative behaviour by some students, especially if the administrator was unsupportive. Some expressed a sense of isolation in which they reported feeling invisible, unappreciated, and not knowing where to turn for help. TTOC in the survey appreciated very much those schools with supportive policies, such as being welcoming and respectful, orienting the TTOC on the first day, having a daily plan and instructions binders ready upon arrival, and implementing consistent procedures.

Survey respondents made many suggestions for improving the working conditions of TTOC. First, more orientation of new TTOC to school procedures and facilities, and more recognition and respect for the role of TTOCs are needed. Second, while many expressed appreciation for improvements in pay and seniority, it was suggested that TTOC need health benefits and that all TTOC assignments should count toward seniority. Third, refine the call-out system by increasing the continuity of assignments, providing advance notice for scheduled events, matching assignments with area of expertise, and training TTOC on new, automated call-out systems. Fourth, more consistent procedures are needed, especially regarding safety issues such as school lockdowns. Finally, provide opportunities for TTOC so that it is easier to obtain permanent teaching positions.

A PowerPoint presentation with the preliminary results can be located at <http://www.bctf.ca/TeachersOnCall.aspx?id=5022>. The final report is forthcoming. For further information about the data analysis, please contact Margaret White (mwhite@bctf.ca) in the BCTF Research Department. For queries related to teachers teaching on call, please contact Kelly Shields (kshields@bctf.ca), Staff Co-ordinator for the TTOC Advisory Committee.

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