

BCTF Research Report

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SECTION III
2003-WLC-01

The good, the bad, and the indifferent: A comparison of elementary and secondary teachers' workload and stress issues

www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2003wlc01

Analysis of data from the BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series,
1: Workload and Stress (April 2001)

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Acknowledgments

BCTF Research wishes to thank all those teachers who added to their workload and responded to this and other BCTF surveys during Spring 2001. The range and depth of their responses has provided the data on which to base this report, which will be used to lobby government and school boards to develop a healthier school system by reducing teachers' workload and stress.

BCTF Research staff Larry Kuehn, Charlie Naylor and Anny Schaefer designed the survey instrument in consultation with BCTF staff and the bargaining team of the day. BCTF Research Assistant Anne Field formatted the survey for TELEform data entry, processed the surveys, prepared the data for quantitative and qualitative analysis, and completed formatting of reports.

2001 Worklife of Teachers survey series

In Spring 2001, BCTF Research staff prepared and administered three mail-out surveys focusing on teacher workload and stress. The first survey examined the workload of secondary teachers of English ("English Teaching Workload Survey Questionnaire," March 2001). The second considered workload and stress issues as perceived by both elementary and secondary teachers ("Workload Issues and Stress," April 2001), and the third addressed teacher perspectives on issues in Special Education ("Special Education," June 2001).

For further information and other worklife reports, visit the **Worklife of British Columbia teachers** home page at www.bctf.ca/education/worklife and Information Services' **Teacher workload** home page at www.bctf.ca/info/research/TeacherWorkload/.

Executive summary

Background

In Spring 2001, BCTF Research surveyed teachers on a variety of issues related to working life, including workload and stress. This report examines workload and stress in the context of the differences and similarities between elementary and secondary teachers. Overall, 644 teachers completed the questionnaire, of whom 375 (58.2%) taught elementary grades only, 226 (35.1%) taught secondary grades only, and 43 (6.7%) taught at other levels, including middle school, Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, and adult education.

Hours worked

BCTF Research attempted to ascertain number of hours worked each week in a variety of activities, such as “teaching in assigned classes”, “marking”, “preparation”, and 10 other job-related tasks, broken down by time spent during regular school hours, before and after school in the evening, and on weekends. Unfortunately the matrix was too complex to yield usable results.

Increased workload

Two-thirds (65.4%) of teachers who have taught 5 or more years report that their workload increased over 5 years earlier.

Report cards

The largest group of teachers (28.4%) spends 6 to 10 hours preparing report cards, on top of their usual contact hours, preparation time, and other activities. On average, teachers spend 14.75 hours completing each set of report cards. Elementary and secondary teachers have markedly different patterns of working on report cards: Preparing report cards appears to be a particularly intense activity for most elementary teachers. On average, elementary teachers spend more than twice as much time preparing report cards, as do secondary teachers (19.3 hours compared to 8.12).

Most teachers (86.5%) have access to a computer (alone or combined with other supports) to prepare their report cards. Elementary teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to have access to only a computer or a computer and clerical support, whereas secondary teachers are more likely to have access to a computer plus software, or a computer, software, and clerical support.

Only 41% of elementary teachers are required to use particular software to create report cards, compared to 78% of secondary teachers (56% overall). It appears that different expectations of elementary and secondary teachers with respect to reporting are likely to be the most important variable affecting hours spent completing report cards.

Positive and stressful aspects of teaching

Relationships – with students, other teachers, Teaching Assistants, and administrators (in that order) – are the most positive factors in teachers’ working lives. By the same token, the most *overall* stress in teachers’ lives (including low, medium and high) is caused by student-related factors: the effects of dysfunctional family environments, the unmet needs of students, and non-designated “grey-area” students. All three of these factors present significant frustrations for teachers. Factors causing the most *high* stress include class composition, the unmet needs of students, preparing report cars, students from dysfunctional family environments, size of

workload, non-designated, “grey-area” students, the inclusion of students with special needs, student behaviour, class size, and salary.

Class size

71% of teachers find class size to be a low, medium, or high source of stress. Six out of ten teachers – both elementary and secondary – find class size either moderately or highly stressful. Elementary teachers were half again as likely as secondary teachers to view their class sizes positively (21% versus 14%), while 68% of elementary teachers, compared to 74% of secondary, cited this element as a stress factor. Interestingly, however, a greater proportion of elementary teachers – a category that includes Grades 4–7 as well – view class-size as a *high-stress* phenomenon: 31% vs. 25%.

Class composition

About 85% of both elementary and secondary teachers find class composition (i.e., more students with English as a Second Language or special needs, or who are disruptive) stressful, but elementary teachers are more likely to find it *highly* stressful.

Inclusion of students with special needs

Nearly 9 out of every 10 teachers experience inclusion as stressful. Elementary teachers, however, are more than half again as likely to experience *high* stress on account of this factor.

Non-designated, “grey-area” students

“Grey-area” students are those who exhibit special learning needs but do not have a special-needs designation or any additional dedicated resources besides Learning Assistance. Just under 90% of teachers overall view the presence of such students as stressful on any level, but many more elementary teachers than secondary teachers (40% compared to 24%) experience *high* stress on account of having non-designated, “grey-area” students in their classrooms.

Split-grade/multi-grade classes

Split- or multi-grade classes are marginally more stressful for elementary than for secondary teachers: One in five secondary teachers is neutral or indicates no effect of such classes; however, nearly one in four elementary teachers and one in five secondary teachers find split- or multi-grade classes a source of *high* stress.

Student behaviour

A minority of teachers (just over one in ten, or 11%) view student behaviour as a positive aspect of their working lives, with a slightly larger proportion of secondary than elementary teachers responding positively. In contrast, 85% find student behaviour stressful: 19% rate it as low stress, and 33% each as medium or high stress. Two-thirds of teachers are either moderately or highly stressed by student behaviour, with virtually no difference between the experience of elementary and secondary teachers.

Work environment

Lack of preparation time is stressful for 85% of all teachers, although it appears to be more serious for secondary teachers: Half again as many secondary as elementary teachers (35% versus 23%) consider lack of prep time a high-stress factor.

Preparing report cards is stressful for 86% of teachers – *highly* stressful for almost 40%. Nearly half of elementary teachers view the activity as *highly* stressful, while about 30% of secondary teachers see it as *low* stress.

Almost 8 in 10 teachers (78.6%) experience stress because of *lack of control over their work environment*. Secondary teachers are more affected than elementary teachers (82% versus 75.9%). One-quarter of secondary teachers (25.7%) compared to 15% of elementary teachers view lack of control as a source of *high* stress.

A substantial minority of both elementary and secondary teachers (33% and 23% respectively) are positive about *teacher involvement in decision-making*, while one-quarter of secondary teachers are neutral about this issue, compared to 14% of elementary teachers. Just over half of each group considers their involvement (or lack thereof) to be mildly, moderately or highly stressful, although the largest groups identify it as low stress.

Nearly one-third of teachers find *working with school-based teams (SBTs)* a positive experience, while about half experience it as stressful. Elementary teachers are slightly more likely to see SBTs as *moderately* stressful, while secondary teachers are more likely to view them as *highly* stressful.

Inadequate levels of learning resources are a source of stress to 85% of teachers, with little difference in perceptions of secondary and elementary teachers.

Size of workload is a source of stress for about 9 out of 10 teachers (88.1%). Elementary teachers are disproportionately affected, however, with 71% indicating their workload is a source of medium or high stress, compared to 61% of secondary teachers.

The *Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)* affects elementary and secondary teachers differently: Nearly 40% of secondary teachers report no or neutral effects of the FSA, compared to only 16% of elementary. Nonetheless, 83% of elementary teachers and 55% of secondary teachers, or 71% of all teachers, cite the FSA as either a low-, medium-, or high-stress factor, and nearly one in three (30%) elementary teachers is highly stressed by FSA.

Provincial (Grade 12) exams are a source of *low, medium, or high stress* for two-thirds (67.5%) of secondary teachers. One out of every four secondary teachers views provincial exams as a *high-stress* factor.

Relationships and attitudes

Slightly more elementary than secondary teachers (73% compared to 66%) are positive about their *relationships with students*, but 22% of elementary and 27% of secondary teachers view relationships with students as a source of stress, although usually *low* stress.

About two-thirds of teachers (64.4%) see their *relationships with other teachers* as a positive aspect of their working lives, with more elementary teachers (68% versus 58%) expressing this sentiment.

Teachers are divided on their views of *relationships with administrators*. Almost half of teachers (48.2%) report that their relationships with administrators are a positive aspect of teaching. But more elementary than secondary teachers are positive about their interactions with administrators (53% versus 39%). About 38% of teachers view their dealings with administrators as a source of stress, although the largest groups rate this factor low on the stress scale.

Relationships with Teaching Assistants (TAs) are positive for 62% of teachers, and a source of stress for 23%. More elementary teachers are positive about TAs, while slightly more secondary teachers find their interactions with TAs stressful (24% vs 22%). The majority of these report *low* stress on account of this factor, however.

Four out of 10 teachers (39%) see their *relationships with parents* as a positive factor; there is virtually no difference between elementary and secondary teachers in this regard; however, secondary teachers are more than twice as likely to indicate their relationship with parents has no effect or is neutral (16.2% versus 6.6%). Half of teachers experience stress in their relationships with parents—somewhat more elementary teachers—but it is for the most part ranked as low- or medium-stress.

70% of teachers find *public attitudes and actions* to be a stressful influence, primarily low or medium. Secondary teachers are more likely to experience high stress, while elementary teachers are more likely to experience medium stress in response to this factor.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of teachers perceive their *school board's actions and attitudes* as stressful, a tendency that is more pronounced among secondary teachers (77% versus 70%). They are also more likely to view the attitudes and actions of the school board as a *high-stress* factor (21.4% versus 17%).

Most teachers (83%) find the *attitudes and actions of government* to be a source of stress, with little difference overall between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions; however, one-third of secondary teachers (34%) are highly stressed by government attitudes and actions, compared to just over one-fifth of elementary teachers (22%).

Secondary teachers are slightly more sensitive to *media focus on education* than elementary teachers (71.8% versus 67.4%), although more than two-thirds of teachers (68.3% overall) find it a stressful factor in their working lives.

Miscellaneous factors

More than 94% of teachers rate *the unmet needs of their students* as a source of stress, 42% as a high-stress factor. Almost half of elementary teachers (48%) are *highly* stressed by their students' unmet needs, compared to one-third of secondary teachers (33.3%).

Over three-quarters (77%) of both elementary and secondary teachers view their *salary* as a source of low, medium, or high stress, but secondary teachers are half again as likely as elementary teachers to respond to this factor with high stress (35% vs. 23%).

Three-quarters of teachers experience stress because of *lack of teachers on call*, but it is more likely to cause elementary teachers *medium* or *high* stress (43.7% versus 41.7%) or, conversely, no effect (23.7% versus 20.3%), than secondary teachers.

Most teachers (84%) experience stress as a result of *child poverty and other social issues*, however, elementary teachers have a higher propensity than secondary teachers for this factor to result in *medium* or *high* stress (54% versus 36.2%).

While more than 95% of teachers are stressed by *the presence of students from dysfunctional family environments*, secondary teachers are more likely to rate as *low* than elementary teachers, who are more likely to rate it as *high*.

Five-year change in stress level

An alarming result of this study is that three-quarters of teachers (75.2%) had a higher stress level in 2001 than five years earlier, with the effect slightly more pronounced among secondary teachers. Elementary teachers are nearly twice as likely to report *lower* stress between 1996 and 2001 than secondary teachers (8% compared to 4%).

Five-year change in job satisfaction

Four of every ten teachers (38.4%) found their jobs in 2001 less satisfying than five years earlier, 18% reported no change, 19% were more satisfied, and 25% indicated a change but not necessarily an increase or decrease in job satisfaction. Secondary teachers are more likely to experience lower job satisfaction (42% versus 37%) or a value-neutral change (20% versus 17%), while elementary teachers are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction (20% versus 16%) or no change (26% versus 22%). Further exploration could reveal whether these results are related to lower class sizes in Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Reasons for decreased job satisfaction were varied and not clear-cut, although a large contingent of teachers did cite *limited flexibility in approach to work* as a factor that decreased their job satisfaction *to some extent*.

Work effects and coping strategies

A key finding of this study is that 84% of teachers report *fatigue* resulting from work: Nearly 90% of secondary and 82% of elementary teachers. This statistic can now be compared to similar results for other occupations. While two-thirds of teachers report *loss of time for personal interests or hobbies* owing to work commitments, this factor affects secondary teachers disproportionately (71.7% versus 62.9%). *Loss of time with family or friends* is also a major effect, having an impact on over six of every ten teachers (61.2%): Secondary teachers are much more affected than elementary teachers (69% versus 56.5%). *Health problems* resulting from teaching are identified by almost four in ten teachers (37.3%), with virtually equal results for both elementary and secondary teachers. *Less interest in other areas* affects about one in four teachers (23.9%): Elementary and secondary teachers were similarly affected.

Coping strategies

Seven out of ten teachers rate *engaging in exercise* and *receiving support from family and friends* as *moderately* or *very* effective coping strategies. The strategy judged next most effective was *pursuing hobbies*, which was rated *moderately* or *very* effective by six in ten teachers. *Taking sick leave* and *working reduced hours* are not common strategies for dealing with stress unless a crisis point is reached; hence, relatively few respondents – approximately one-third – provided a rating for each of these options. Almost half of teachers appeared to have some experience of using *relaxation techniques*, but only 56% rated them as *moderately* or *very* effective. Other than *engaging in exercise*, which was ranked similarly by both elementary and secondary teachers, and *taking sick leave*, which secondary teachers more often rated as “*moderately effective*,” elementary teachers generally report more success with the specified coping strategies.

Conditions that could ameliorate workload and stress levels

Better resources are deemed the factor that would have the most positive effect on teachers’ workload and stress levels, with more than seven in ten teachers saying such resources would have a *significant positive effect* (72.2%) and a further 24% saying they would have a *moderate positive effect*. Nine out of ten teachers called for *better professional support*, while similar but slightly lower proportions called for *better organization*. Elementary teachers were more likely than secondary teachers to think that better resources and better professional support would have a significant positive effect on their workload and stress levels, while secondary teachers were more likely than elementary to believe that better organization would be useful.

Absence because of illness or disability

The vast majority of teachers – two-thirds – used zero to five days of sick leave in the 2000-01 school year. Secondary teachers were more likely to fall into this category than elementary teachers, and slightly more likely to take six to ten days; otherwise elementary teachers were more likely to take more than 10 days of sick leave in the year. Overall, nearly 6% of teachers used at least one month of sick leave in the 2000-01 school year; elementary teachers were more than twice as likely as secondary teachers to use large amounts of sick leave (7.1% versus 3.3%).

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this survey add to the body of research about the working conditions of various occupations and professions – in this case teachers in general, and in British Columbia in particular. It is also hoped that school boards, parents, locals, the provincial government, and others interested in the health of the public-education system, will use them to improve the working and learning conditions of teachers in this province.

The data provided by teachers in this study of workload and stress tell a story of a system already under stress, even before the cutbacks that resulted from policies implemented by the B.C. Liberal government after their 2001 landslide election. The information generated by this study therefore represents a baseline that can be used to assess the impacts of such policies, particularly if surveying is repeated in several years. There are also implications for teacher supply and demand, a complex area that is highly susceptible to changes in government policy and extremely vulnerable to an ageing workforce.

The data from this study are rich and not yet fully mined, so it is recommended that the data from this and the other two studies that made up **Worklife 2001** (secondary teachers of English and special education) be made available to other researchers.

The collective wisdom gleaned on the effects of a stressful work life on personal life, and on effective coping strategies, has implications for the wellness programs that are more and more often made available to teachers.

School boards may wish to assess the differences that emerged between the experiences of elementary and secondary teachers to modify requirements for the two groups, such as those related to report cards.

It is recommended that surveying be repeated in several years and that the researchers consider adding some additional questions, such as class size or caseload, and access to specialist teacher support, so these items can be correlate with stress factors. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers be asked to rate their own teaching-related stress levels overall.

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Introduction

This report adds to previous analysis already completed on the *BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload and Stress*. This report focuses on a comparison of the experiences of teachers at the elementary and secondary levels, based on the assumption that these teachers have differing working and learning conditions.

The three published reports are available on the BCTF web site:

- *Demographic overview: Teacher workload issues and stress survey, Spring 2001.*
(Anny Schaefer) December 2001. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc05/
- *What do British Columbia's teachers consider to be the most significant aspects of workload and stress in their work? Analysis of qualitative data from the BCTF worklife of teachers survey series, 1: Workload and Stress*
(Charlie Naylor) October, 2001. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc03/
- *"How I spent my summer vacation": Time-use data from the Spring 2001 BCTF worklife of teachers Workload issues and stress survey.*
(Anny Schaefer) December 2001. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc04/

Overall, 644 teachers completed the questionnaire, of whom 375 (58.2%) taught elementary grades only, 226 (35.1%) taught secondary grades only, and 43 (6.7%) taught at other levels, including middle school, Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, and adult education.

Notes on data and definitions

"Elementary" refers to teachers who teach Kindergarten to Grade 7, while "secondary" refers to teachers of Grades 8-12. "Other" is used throughout this report to include any teaching level that is *not* elementary or secondary, e.g. unspecified, mixed levels, and adult education. Data on these teachers is included in tables for informational purposes, but is not analyzed because of generally small sample sizes.

Percentage totals may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Missing values and those marked "N/A" (not applicable) were omitted so that totals are based on those who responded, unless otherwise specified.

Hours worked

Our questionnaire asked teachers to complete a table indicating total hours worked in a variety of activities, such as "teaching in assigned classes", "working with students outside class time", "marking", "doing preparation", and nine other job-related tasks. We also asked them to break down their total hours into time spent during regular school hours, before and after school, in the evening, and on weekends (*Figure 1*). Unfortunately, although we field-tested the survey before distributing the final version, the matrix proved far too complex for a questionnaire of this type, and yielded ambiguous results.

Other researchers have employed a variety of methods to determine the number of hours teachers work. For example, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation employed a diary approach during two distinct workweeks in November and March and concluded that their members worked an average of 47 hours during these two relatively quiet weeks.¹ The Nova Scotia

¹ *The workload and worklife of Saskatchewan Teachers: Full-time teachers, 1994-1995*. Available online at www.stf.sk.ca/teaching_res/research/pdf/work_load_full.pdf.

Teachers' Union conducted a similar time-use study and concluded "teachers spend 52.5 hours per week on teaching-related activities. Surprisingly, the time teachers estimated that they spend on teaching-related activities (51 hours a week) fell short of the actual time (52.54 work-hours per week) derived from the diaries."²

Figure 1

Hours Worked

11. a. How many hours per week does your school schedule for recess and lunch breaks, to the nearest hour? hours

b. How many hours per week, on average, do you spend working during recess and lunch breaks, to the nearest hour? hours

12. How many **hours in total** (rounded to the nearest hour) do you spend in an average **week** on the following work-related tasks, and **when** do you spend them? N.B. This question **excludes** report-card writing.

| <u>Task</u> | <u>Total Hours</u> | <u>During regular school hours, including recess and lunch</u> | <u>Before/after school/evenings</u> | <u>Weekends</u> |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| a. Teaching in assigned classes | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> hours | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> hours | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> hours | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> hours |
| b. Working with students outside class time | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| c. Marking | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| d. Doing preparation (all types) | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| e. Attending meetings (all types) | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| f. Doing paperwork & record-keeping | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| g. Other administrative tasks | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| h. Extra-curricular activities | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| i. Contact with parents | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| j. Fund-raising | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| Other job-related tasks (please specify) | | | | |
| k. <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| l. <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |
| m. <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> |

Alberta teachers completed a similar diary instrument, resulting in a range of 50.5 to 54.3 hours per week, depending in part on whether report cards were being completed during the period.³ New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL), using a survey format, determined that full-time teachers spend more than 47 hours a week on the job, including 28 hours of assigned timetable teaching duties and 19 hours of other school-related work; the authors concluded that survey methods underestimate hours worked by teachers, compared to the more detailed diary estimation method.⁴ A survey conducted by the B.C. Teachers' Federation concluded that secondary English teachers work more than 53 hours a week, and that this is probably an underestimate.⁵

² *Life on and off the job: A time-use study of Nova Scotia teachers*, available online at www.nstu.ca/timeuse/.

³ Alberta teachers, A workload study, available online at www.teacher.ab.ca/publications/monographs/workload/workload04.html#Average.

⁴ NALL Working Paper #14-2000: *Teacher learning, informal and formal: Results of a Canadian Teachers' Federation survey*, available online at www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/14teacherlearning.htm

⁵ "I love teaching English, but...": A study of the workload of English teachers in B.C. secondary grades, Section 2 of this report, and available online at www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc02/.

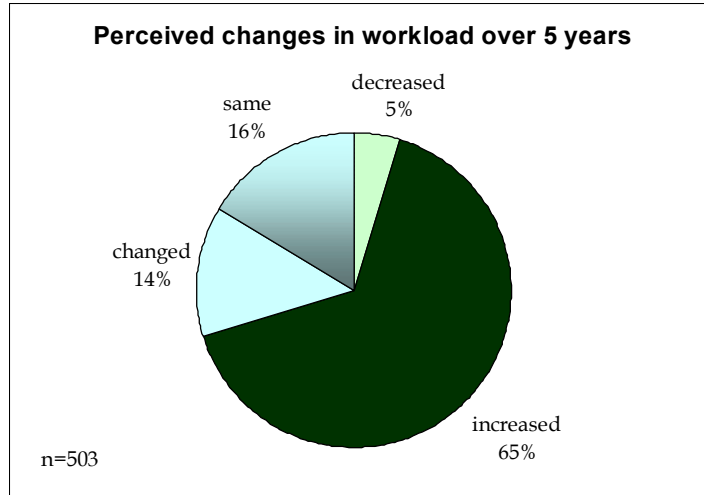
Changes in workload

Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that your workload has:

- increased
- decreased
- stayed the same
- changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased

Two-thirds (65.4%) of teachers who have taught 5 or more years report that their workload increased over 5 years earlier (Figure 2). Another 16.3% state that their workload stayed the same, 13.5% that it “changed, but not necessarily increased or decreased,” and less than 5% that it decreased.

Figure 2



Report cards

Time spent

The last time you did report cards, how many hours did you spend doing them?

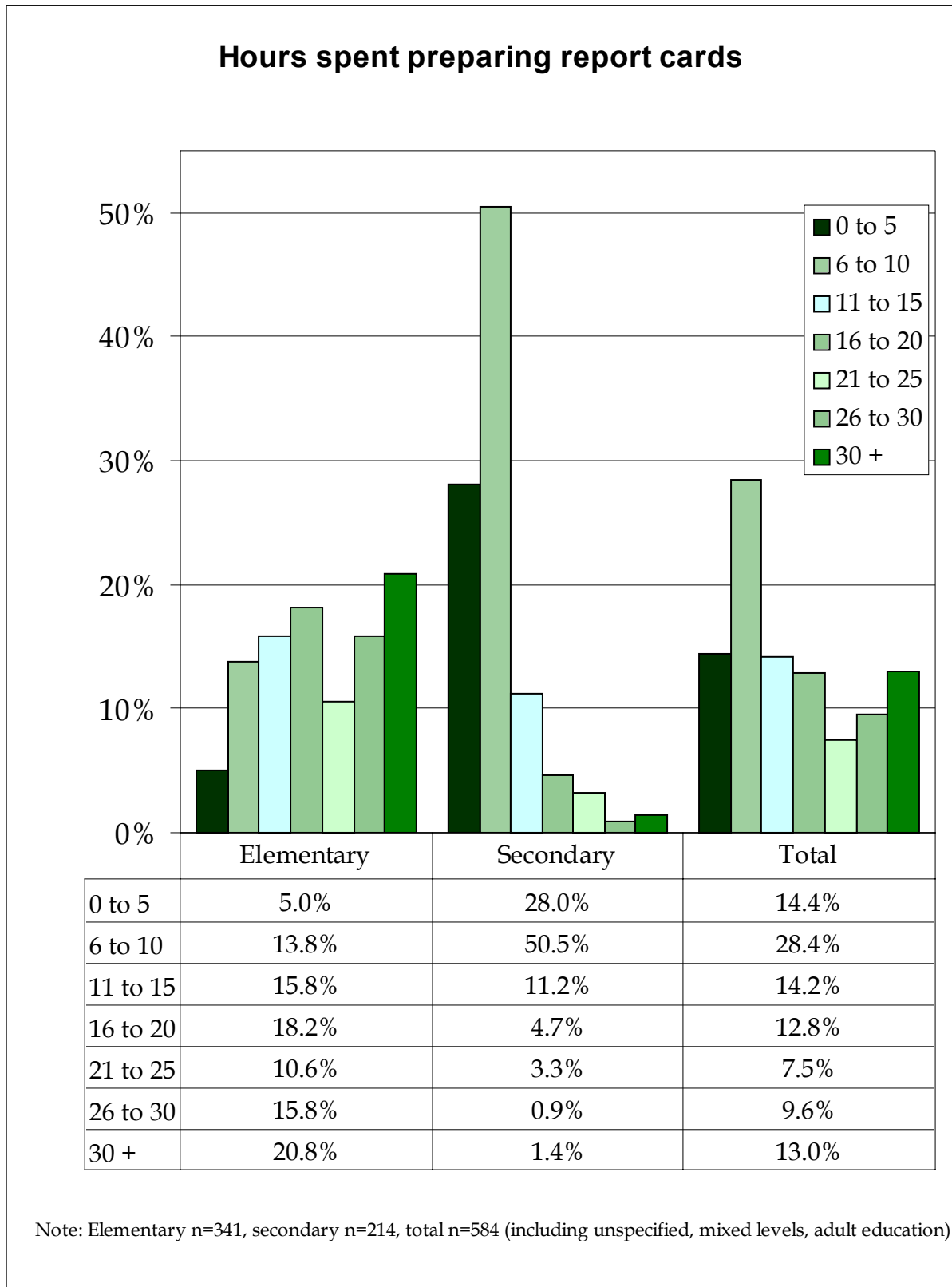
- N/A
- 0-5 hours
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+ hours

The largest group of teachers (28.4%) spends 6 to 10 hours preparing report cards, on top of their usual contact hours, preparation time, and other activities (Figure 3). The other 71.6% of teachers are spread more or less evenly among 0 to 5, 11 to 15, and 30 or more hours, along with slightly fewer reporting 26 to 30 or 21 to 25 hours. On average, teachers spend 14.75 hours completing each set of report cards.⁶

Elementary and secondary teachers have markedly different patterns of working on report cards, however. Preparing report cards appears to be a particularly intense activity for most elementary teachers. The largest group of secondary teachers (50.5%) reports spending 6 to 10 hours, compared to 30 or more hours for the largest group of elementary teachers (20.8%). Nearly 80% of secondary teachers spend 10 hours or less on this activity, compared to only about 20% of elementary teachers. On the other hand, 20.8% of elementary teachers spend 30 or more hours preparing report cards, compared to only 1.4% of secondary teachers. On average, elementary teachers spend more than twice as much time preparing report cards, as do secondary teachers (19.3 hours compared to 8.12).

⁶ Averages were calculated by weighting midpoints for categories 0 to 5 through 26 to 30 hours (e.g., 2.5, 7.5, etc.), and 30 for 30+ hours.

Figure 3



Supports in place

Which of the following supports were provided by your school or district when you did report cards? Please indicate all that apply.

N/A access to a computer access to software access to clerical support

Most teachers (86.5%) have access to a computer (alone or combined with other supports) to prepare their report cards (Table 1). A few (6.4%) have access only to software or to software and clerical support. The most supportive combination of computer, software, and clerical assistance is available to just under 18% of teachers. **Elementary teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to have access to only a computer or a computer and clerical support, whereas secondary teachers are more likely to have access to a computer plus software, or a computer, software, and clerical support.**

Table 1: Supports in place for preparing report cards

| Access to: | Elementary | | Secondary | | Other | | Total | |
|------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| clerical support | 6 | 2.0 | 3 | 1.4 | 1 | 3.6 | 10 | 1.9 |
| computer | 66 | 22.3 | 25 | 12.0 | 7 | 25.0 | 98 | 18.4 |
| computer and clerical support | 13 | 4.4 | 3 | 1.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 16 | 3.0 |
| computer and software | 122 | 41.2 | 118 | 56.7 | 11 | 39.3 | 251 | 47.2 |
| computer, software, and clerical support | 47 | 15.9 | 43 | 20.7 | 5 | 17.9 | 95 | 17.9 |
| software | 26 | 8.8 | 7 | 3.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 33 | 6.2 |
| software and clerical support | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.2 |
| no response* | 16 | 5.4 | 8 | 3.8 | 4 | 14.3 | 28 | 5.3 |
| Total | 296 | 100 | 208 | 100 | 28 | 100 | 532 | 100 |

* No response may mean no support or non-response.

Software required?

Does your district require you to use a particular software program to create report cards?

N/A Yes No

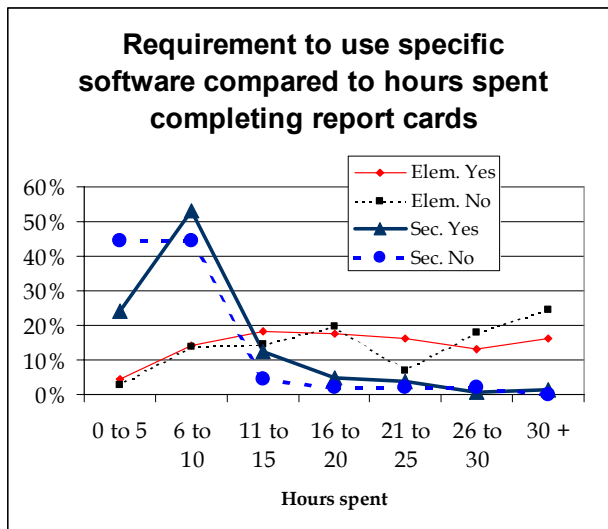
Among the 571 teachers who responded to this question, **56% stated that their district requires them to use a particular software program to create report cards** (Table 2). The practice is less common among elementary teachers, however, of whom only 41% are required to use software, compared to 78% of secondary teachers.

Table 2: Are teachers required to use specific software to create report cards?

| Software required? | Elementary | Secondary | Other |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Yes | 41.4% | 78.2% | 72.4% |
| No | 58.6% | 21.8% | 27.6% |
| Total | n=331 | n=211 | n=29 |

Conclusions about reporting

Figure 4



Our data show that elementary teachers spend much more time than secondary teachers preparing report cards, that less technology and clerical support is available to elementary teachers, and that secondary teachers are much more likely to be required to use specific software to prepare report cards. It would be tempting to conclude that using required software might actually reduce the burden of time devoted to reporting; however, as *Figure 4* indicates, there is very little difference in time spent when elementary and secondary teachers are looked at separately. The heavier lines compare those secondary teachers who are required to use specific software (“Sec. Yes” –

solid line) with those who are not (“Sec. No” – dotted line), indicating minimal differences between the two groups. The lighter lines compare the two groups of elementary teachers and, once again, indicate little difference.

By the same token, elementary teachers are more than twice as likely as secondary teachers to experience high stress levels as a result of preparing report cards: 50% of elementary teachers, compared to 22% of secondary, identify preparing report cards as a high-stress event (*Table 13*).

It appears that different expectations of elementary and secondary teachers with respect to reporting are likely to be the most important variables affecting hours spent completing report cards.

Positive and stressful aspects of teaching

We asked teachers to rate whether each of 29 factors is a positive, neutral, or stressful (low, medium, or high) aspect of their teaching lives, using the following wording plus one fill-in-the-blanks item:

The following may be positive aspects or stress factors in your teaching/work. Please indicate your view of each aspect/factor.

The 29 factors fell into four distinct groups: class size and composition issues, work environment, relationships and attitudes, and miscellaneous factors including unmet needs of students, salary and student poverty. In this analysis, N/A (not applicable) and ambiguous (e.g., marking both “no effect” plus “high stress”) responses were omitted.

Following a summary of results in *Table 3*, listings of the most positive and most stressful aspects of teachers’ working lives are provided. Next, each set of factors is examined in turn, with cross-tabulations for elementary, secondary, and other levels (e.g., those teachers working in K-12 or middle schools).

Table 3: Positive and stressful aspects of teaching

| Factor | n | percent | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----------|-----------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| | | positive | no effect/ neutral | stress | | | |
| | | | | low | medium | high | total |
| CLASS SIZE AND COMPOSITION ISSUES | | | | | | | |
| size of class(es) | 422 | 17.5% | 11.6% | 10.9% | 31.8% | 28.2% | 70.9% |
| class composition (e.g., more ESL/ special needs/disruptive students) | 571 | 10.3% | 4.2% | 8.1% | 30.6% | 46.8% | 85.5% |
| inclusion of students with special needs | 489 | 6.1% | 5.9% | 21.5% | 33.1% | 33.3% | 87.9% |
| non-designated, "grey-area" students | 478 | 0.2% | 10.0% | 17.8% | 37.9% | 34.1% | 89.7% |
| split-grade/multi-grade class(es) | 371 | 4.3% | 15.1% | 26.7% | 31.5% | 22.4% | 80.6% |
| student behaviour | 590 | 11.0% | 3.7% | 18.8% | 33.4% | 33.1% | 85.3% |
| WORK ENVIRONMENT | | | | | | | |
| lack of prep time | 510 | 1.4% | 13.9% | 26.1% | 31.6% | 27.1% | 84.7% |
| preparing report cards | 559 | 7.9% | 5.7% | 19.7% | 27.4% | 39.4% | 86.4% |
| lack of control over work environment | 513 | 1.9% | 19.5% | 29.0% | 30.4% | 19.1% | 78.6% |
| teacher involvement in decision- making | 522 | 29.9% | 18.0% | 21.8% | 19.3% | 10.9% | 52.1% |
| working with school-based teams | 476 | 31.1% | 21.2% | 25.6% | 16.0% | 6.1% | 47.7% |
| inadequate learning resources | 515 | 1.9% | 13.4% | 30.3% | 31.5% | 22.9% | 84.7% |
| size of workload | 538 | 2.4% | 9.5% | 21.0% | 32.7% | 34.4% | 88.1% |
| Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) | 319 | 3.1% | 25.7% | 30.1% | 18.8% | 22.3% | 71.2% |
| provincial exams* | 114 | 7.9% | 24.6% | 19.3% | 22.8% | 25.4% | 67.5% |
| RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES | | | | | | | |
| relationships with students | 558 | 69.5% | 6.5% | 14.3% | 6.8% | 2.9% | 24.0% |
| relationships with other teachers | 564 | 64.4% | 9.6% | 16.8% | 6.0% | 3.2% | 26.1% |
| relationships with AOs | 542 | 48.2% | 13.5% | 19.4% | 12.7% | 6.3% | 38.4% |
| relationships with Teaching Assistants | 486 | 61.9% | 15.0% | 15.2% | 5.8% | 2.1% | 23.0% |
| relationships with parents | 539 | 39.0% | 10.0% | 28.4% | 16.5% | 6.1% | 51.0% |
| attitude/actions of the public | 545 | 10.3% | 20.2% | 32.5% | 24.6% | 12.5% | 69.5% |
| attitude/actions of school board | 549 | 6.9% | 20.9% | 26.4% | 27.5% | 18.2% | 72.1% |
| attitude/actions of government | 552 | 2.0% | 14.9% | 26.8% | 30.3% | 26.1% | 83.2% |
| media focus on education | 546 | 4.4% | 27.3% | 28.8% | 24.2% | 15.4% | 68.3% |
| MISCELLANEOUS | | | | | | | |
| unmet needs of students | 566 | 0.9% | 4.8% | 20.7% | 32.2% | 41.5% | 94.3% |
| salary | 562 | 7.5% | 15.5% | 22.6% | 27.0% | 27.4% | 77.0% |
| lack of TOCs | 485 | 1.9% | 22.7% | 33.0% | 18.8% | 23.7% | 75.5% |
| child poverty and other social issues | 555 | 0.0% | 15.7% | 37.3% | 24.9% | 22.2% | 84.3% |
| students from dysfunctional family environments | 574 | 0.3% | 4.4% | 24.2% | 32.9% | 38.2% | 95.3% |

* Secondary teachers only.

Relationships: The most positive thing about teaching

It is perhaps no surprise that teachers, who have chosen to enter a caring profession, tend to value and enjoy their workplace relationships above all else (*Table 4*). Relationships with students top the list of positive factors, with 70% of teachers viewing them as positive, closely followed by relationships with other teachers at 64% and with Teaching Assistants at 62%. Almost half of teachers view their relationships with AOs as positive, while 39% are positive about relationships with parents. Another relationship factor – working with school-based teams – ranks next, at 31%, closely followed by teacher involvement in decision-making, at 30% (*Table 3*).

Table 4: Top five positive factors in teachers’ working lives

| Factor | % positive |
|----------------------------------------|------------|
| relationships with students | 69.5% |
| relationships with other teachers | 64.4% |
| relationships with Teaching Assistants | 61.9% |
| relationships with AOs | 48.2% |
| relationships with parents | 39.0% |

The most-stressful factors involve students

Teachers clearly identified two student-grounded factors that caused them the most total stress (low, medium or high stress): **The effects of students from dysfunctional family environments (stressful for 95% of teachers) and the unmet needs of students (stressful for 94%)** (*Table 5*). Again, these are not surprising results, given that teachers generally enter the teaching profession to help students. By the same token, **“grey-area” students, i.e., those who exhibit special learning needs but do not have a special-needs designation or any additional dedicated resources (besides Learning Assistance), are a source of stress for 90% of teachers.** Size of workload creates stress for 88% of teachers, as does the practice of inclusion of students with special needs.⁷ **Preparing report cards, class composition, student behaviour, lack of prep time, and inadequate learning resources each create stress for about 85% of teachers.**

⁷ Teachers’ ambivalent responses to special needs are explored elsewhere, e.g., *B.C. teachers’ views of Special Education issues* (Charlie Naylor), June 2002, available online at www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2002wlc01/ and in Section 4 of this report, and *Special Education Review: A brief to the B.C. Ministry of Education* (June 1999), available online at www.bctf.ca/Education/InclusiveEd/SpecialEdReview/brief/.

Table 5: Top 10 total-stress factors in teachers’ working lives

| Factor | Stress | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| | low | medium | high | total |
| students from dysfunctional family environments | 24.2% | 32.9% | 38.2% | 95.3% |
| unmet needs of students | 20.7% | 32.2% | 41.5% | 94.3% |
| non-designated, “grey-area” students | 17.8% | 37.9% | 34.1% | 89.7% |
| size of workload | 21.0% | 32.7% | 34.4% | 88.1% |
| inclusion of students with special needs | 21.5% | 33.1% | 33.3% | 87.9% |
| preparing report cards | 19.7% | 27.4% | 39.4% | 86.4% |
| class composition (e.g., more ESL/special needs/ disruptive students) | 8.1% | 30.6% | 46.8% | 85.5% |
| student behaviour | 18.8% | 33.4% | 33.1% | 85.3% |
| lack of prep time | 26.1% | 31.6% | 27.1% | 84.7% |
| inadequate learning resources | 30.3% | 31.5% | 22.9% | 84.7% |

While *Table 5* ranks **total percentages** of teachers who found these factors either mildly, moderately or highly stressful, *Table 6* lists the items teachers most frequently listed as causing **high stress** in their day-to-day work. The most stressful factor is clearly class composition, which involves the placement of students with highly diverse backgrounds and abilities in one classroom: **Nearly half (47%) of teachers cite class composition as high-stress**. Unmet needs of students, preparing report cards, and the effects of students from dysfunctional family environments are perceived by 38–42% of teachers as highly stressful. About one-third of teachers cite size of workload, grey-area students, inclusion, and student behaviour as highly stressful factors. Size of classes and salary both cause significant stress for just under 30% of teachers.

Table 6: Top 10 high-stress factors in teachers’ working lives

| Factor | % high stress |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| class composition (e.g., more ESL/special needs/ disruptive students) | 46.8% |
| unmet needs of students | 41.5% |
| preparing report cards | 39.4% |
| students from dysfunctional family environments | 38.2% |
| size of workload | 34.4% |
| non-designated, “grey-area” students | 34.1% |
| inclusion of students with special needs | 33.3% |
| student behaviour | 33.1% |
| size of class(es) | 28.2% |
| salary | 27.4% |

Class size and composition issues

We asked teachers to rate the following class-size and class-composition issues as positive, no effect/neutral, or low, medium, or high stress:

- size of class(es)
- class composition (e.g., more ESL/special needs/disruptive students)
- inclusion of students with special needs
- non-designated, “grey-area” students
- split-grade/multi-grade class(es)
- student behaviour

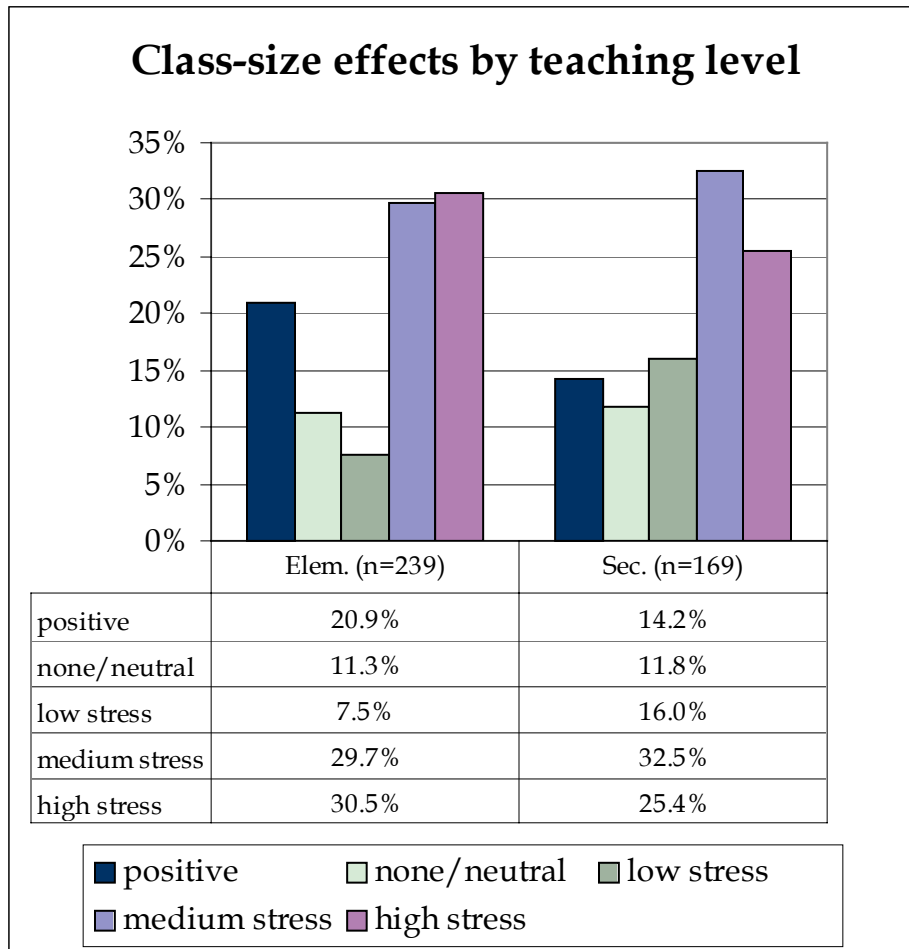
Class size

When asked whether they view class size as a positive aspect of, or a stress factor in, teaching, **71% of teachers identified class size as a low, medium, or high source of stress.⁸ Six out of ten teachers – both elementary and secondary – find class size either moderately or highly stressful.** Unfortunately, we are unable to determine the class sizes of the 18% who saw class size as a positive aspect of worklife; however, breaking the data down into elementary and secondary levels provides further insight into this matter, since Primary class sizes (Kindergarten–Grade 3) were limited by the collective agreement at the time teachers completed the survey.⁹ The results (*Figure 5*) indicate that **elementary teachers were half again as likely as secondary teachers to view their class sizes positively (21% versus 14%), while 68% of elementary teachers, compared to 74% of secondary, cited this element as a stress factor. Interestingly, however, a greater proportion of elementary teachers – a category that includes Grades 4–7 as well – view class-size as a *high*-stress phenomenon: 31% versus 25%.**

⁸ Non-enrolling/specialist teachers were omitted, as were those who did not answer, and “N/A” and ambiguous responses, as described in the Introduction.

⁹ Most local collective agreements also had class-size provisions for other grades; assessing these effects would be extremely complex. Primary class-size provisions were entrenched in the 1998–2001 Provincial Collective Agreement (available online at www.bctf.ca/bargain/agreements/provincial/frames.html), with a limit, subject to certain exceptions, of 20 students in Kindergarten classes and 22 in Grades 1 to 3. As of September 2002, owing to the *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act* (available online at www.legis.gov.bc.ca/37th2nd/3rd_read/gov28-3.htm), new limits are 22 for Kindergarten and 24 for the rest of Primary, with district-wide averages of 19 and 21 respectively; all other local-contract class-size provisions have been superseded by a new district average of 30 for Grades 4–12.

Figure 5



Class composition

Class composition (i.e., more students with English as a Second Language or special needs, or who are disruptive) is highly stressful for about half of elementary teachers compared to 42% of secondary (Table 7), but more secondary teachers report a medium level of stress caused by this factor, evening out the stress totals for the two groups. **About 85% of both elementary and secondary teachers find class composition stressful.**

Table 7: Effects of class composition by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 10.6% | 9.3% | 14.8% | 10.3% |
| None/neutral | 3.8% | 5.4% | 0.0% | 4.2% |
| Total stress | 85.6% | 85.3% | 85.2% | 85.5% |
| low stress | 8.2% | 7.8% | 7.4% | 8.1% |
| medium stress | 27.1% | 35.8% | 37.0% | 30.6% |
| high stress | 50.3% | 41.7% | 40.7% | 46.8% |
| <i>n</i> | 340 | 204 | 27 | 571 |

Inclusion of students with special needs

BCTF Research has prepared numerous reports on the issue of inclusion (mainstreaming of students with special needs).¹⁰ This item attempts to measure teachers' stress responses to inclusion, without placing a value judgment on the practice. Our results indicate that **nearly 9 out of every 10 teachers experience inclusion as stressful. Elementary teachers are more than half again as likely to experience high stress on its account, but secondary teachers make up the difference with low- and medium-stress responses** (Table 8).

As an indicator of the ambivalence in the teaching community around the issue of inclusion, 57 respondents state both that inclusion of students with special needs was a positive aspect of their teaching practice and also indicate that inclusion causes either low, medium, or high levels of stress for them. These ambiguous results were excluded from the analysis.

Table 8: Effects of inclusion of students with special needs by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 6.4% | 4.7% | 13.0% | 6.1% |
| None/neutral | 5.1% | 7.1% | 8.7% | 5.9% |
| Total stress | 88.5% | 88.2% | 78.3% | 87.9% |
| low stress | 19.3% | 26.5% | 13.0% | 21.5% |
| medium stress | 29.4% | 37.6% | 47.8% | 33.1% |
| high stress | 39.9% | 24.1% | 17.4% | 33.3% |
| <i>n</i> | 296 | 170 | 23 | 489 |

Non-designated, “grey-area” students

As noted earlier, “grey-area” students are those who exhibit special learning needs but do not have a special-needs designation or any additional dedicated resources besides Learning Assistance (Table 9). **Just under 90% of teachers overall view the presence of grey-area students as stressful. Almost twice as many elementary teachers (40.2%) as secondary teachers (23.9%) experience high stress on account of having non-designated, “grey-area” students in their classrooms.**

Table 9: Effects of non-designated, “grey-area” students by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.2% |
| None/neutral | 7.2% | 14.7% | 12.5% | 10.0% |
| Total stress | 92.4% | 85.3% | 87.5% | 89.7% |
| low stress | 15.5% | 22.1% | 16.7% | 17.8% |
| medium stress | 36.8% | 39.3% | 41.7% | 37.9% |
| high stress | 40.2% | 23.9% | 29.2% | 34.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 291 | 163 | 24 | 478 |

¹⁰ Refer to the Inclusive Education page on the BCTF web site, www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/.

Split-grade/multi-grade classes

Our data indicate that split- or multi-grade classes are marginally more stressful for elementary than for secondary teachers (*Table 10*): One in five secondary teachers is neutral or indicates no effect of such classes; however, **nearly one in four elementary teachers and one in five secondary teachers find split- or multi-grade classes a source of high stress.**

Table 10: Effects of split-grade/multi-grade classes by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 3.8% | 5.9% | 0.0% | 4.3% |
| None/neutral | 12.7% | 19.6% | 33.3% | 15.1% |
| Total stress | 83.5% | 74.5% | 66.7% | 80.6% |
| low stress | 25.0% | 31.4% | 22.2% | 26.7% |
| medium stress | 35.0% | 23.5% | 22.2% | 31.5% |
| high stress | 23.5% | 19.6% | 22.2% | 22.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 260 | 102 | 9 | 371 |

Student behaviour

Just over one in ten teachers (11%) view student behaviour as a positive aspect of their working lives, with a slightly larger proportion of secondary than elementary teachers responding positively (*Table 11*). Incorporating the 5% of elementary and 2% of secondary teachers who report no or neutral impact of this variable, we can conclude that approximately 15% of teachers are happy with, or at least neutral about, the behaviour of their students. In contrast, **85% find student behaviour stressful: 19% rate it as low stress, and 33% each as medium or high stress. Two-thirds of teachers are moderately or highly stressed by student behaviour, with virtually no difference between the experience of elementary and secondary teachers.**

Table 11: Effects of student behaviour by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 10.0% | 11.5% | 18.8% | 11.0% |
| None/neutral | 4.9% | 1.9% | 3.1% | 3.7% |
| Total stress | 85.1% | 86.5% | 78.1% | 85.3% |
| low stress | 17.7% | 20.2% | 21.9% | 18.8% |
| medium stress | 33.7% | 34.6% | 21.9% | 33.4% |
| high stress | 33.7% | 31.7% | 34.4% | 33.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 350 | 208 | 32 | 590 |

Work environment

This section examines the following work-environment variables:

lack of preparation time; preparing report cards; lack of control over work environment; teacher involvement in decision-making; working with school-based teams; inadequate learning resources; size of workload; Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA); and provincial exams.

Lack of preparation time

Lack of preparation time is stressful for 85% of all teachers (Table 12), although it appears to be more serious for secondary teachers: Half again as many secondary as elementary teachers (35% versus 23%) consider lack of prep time a high-stress factor, while a slightly larger proportion of elementary teachers rate it as either low- or medium-stress.

Table 12: Effects of lack of prep time by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 1.3% | 1.6% | 0.0% | 1.4% |
| None/neutral | 15.5% | 11.4% | 13.6% | 13.9% |
| Total stress | 83.2% | 87.0% | 86.4% | 84.7% |
| low stress | 26.1% | 23.2% | 50.0% | 26.1% |
| medium stress | 34.0% | 29.2% | 18.2% | 31.6% |
| high stress | 23.1% | 34.6% | 18.2% | 27.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 303 | 185 | 22 | 510 |

Preparing report cards

Overall, 86% of teachers find preparing report cards stressful (Table 13). Almost 40% of teachers find report-card preparation a *highly* stressful activity, with another 27% seeing it as *moderately* stressful, and 20% as low-stress but not positive or neutral. As noted earlier, preparing report cards is particularly taxing for many elementary teachers: Nearly half of elementary teachers view the activity as very stressful, while about 30% of secondary teachers see it as “low-stress”.

Table 13: Report card effects by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 8.6% | 7.5% | 0.0% | 7.9% |
| None/neutral | 2.7% | 10.4% | 10.0% | 5.7% |
| Total stress | 88.8% | 82.1% | 90.0% | 86.4% |
| low stress | 13.0% | 29.9% | 30.0% | 19.7% |
| medium stress | 26.0% | 29.9% | 25.0% | 27.4% |
| high stress | 49.7% | 22.4% | 35.0% | 39.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 338 | 201 | 20 | 559 |

Lack of control over work environment

A seminal British study of public servants has identified a high-pressure work environment combined with lack of control over one's working life as a major determinant of health problems.¹¹ The British government took the results so seriously that it has just issued a new code requiring employers to reduce stress to manageable levels based on six standards (determined to be met if 65 to 85% of staff agree) or be faced with legal action.¹² **Our study indicates that almost 8 in 10 teachers (78.6%) experience stress because of lack of control over their work environment (Table 14). Secondary teachers are the more affected of the two groups: Three-quarters of elementary teachers (75.9%) and 82% of secondary teachers experience stress resulting from lack of control over their working environment. Furthermore, one-quarter of secondary teachers (25.7%) compared to 15% of elementary teachers view lack of control as a source of high stress.** While it is apparent that both groups are affected, the results raise many questions: Do elementary and secondary teachers interpret "lack of control over the work environment" differently, do they have different expectations, or are there differences in how teachers at different levels respond to such factors as class size and composition, and other facets of decision-making at the school and classroom levels?

Table 14: Effects of lack of control over work environment by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 2.3% | 1.6% | 0.0% | 1.9% |
| None/neutral | 21.8% | 16.4% | 13.0% | 19.5% |
| Total stress | 75.9% | 82.0% | 87.0% | 78.6% |
| low stress | 29.6% | 27.3% | 34.8% | 29.0% |
| medium stress | 30.9% | 29.0% | 34.8% | 30.4% |
| high stress | 15.3% | 25.7% | 17.4% | 19.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 307 | 183 | 23 | 513 |

Teacher involvement in decision-making

A substantial minority of both elementary and secondary teachers (33% and 23% respectively) are positive about teacher involvement in decision-making (Table 15). One-quarter of secondary teachers are neutral about this issue, compared to 14% of elementary teachers. Just over half of each group considers their involvement (or lack thereof) to be mildly, moderately or highly stressful, although the largest groups identify it as low stress.

Table 15: Effects of teacher involvement in decision-making by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 33.3% | 22.9% | 40.9% | 29.9% |
| None/neutral | 14.4% | 24.5% | 13.6% | 18.0% |
| Total stress | 52.2% | 52.7% | 45.5% | 52.1% |
| low stress | 22.8% | 20.7% | 18.2% | 21.8% |
| medium stress | 20.5% | 16.5% | 27.3% | 19.3% |
| high stress | 9.0% | 15.4% | 0.0% | 10.9% |
| <i>n</i> | 312 | 188 | 22 | 522 |

¹¹ The Whitehall II study has followed 10,000 British civil servants since 1985. For further information, see www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology/white/w2homepage.htm.

¹² "Employers who ignore stress face legal action," by Jeremy Laurance, *The Independent*, retrieved from the web on June 16, 2003 at www.news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/story.jsp?story=415902.

Working with school-based teams

Nearly one-third of teachers find working with school-based teams (SBTs) a positive experience (Table 16). On the other hand, about half (47.7%) experience it as stressful, but half of these rate it as only a low-stress factor. Elementary teachers are slightly more likely to see SBTs as moderately stressful, while secondary teachers are more likely to view them as highly stressful.

Table 16: Effects of school-based teams by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 33.1% | 26.9% | 35.0% | 31.1% |
| None/neutral | 19.6% | 26.3% | 5.0% | 21.2% |
| Total stress | 47.3% | 46.9% | 60.0% | 47.7% |
| low stress | 24.3% | 25.6% | 45.0% | 25.6% |
| medium stress | 17.9% | 12.5% | 15.0% | 16.0% |
| high stress | 5.1% | 8.8% | 0.0% | 6.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 296 | 160 | 20 | 476 |

Inadequate learning resources

The 2% of teachers who responded positively about “inadequate learning resources” were likely signaling that they find their access to learning resources at least adequate (Table 17). The same could probably be said about most the 12% of elementary and 16% of secondary teachers who are neutral or report no effect. That 85% of teachers feel stressed by inadequate levels of learning resources speaks volumes about the lack of resources available to teachers in this province, however. BCTF Research has documented underspending of earmarked learning resources funds over the years, and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation established several years ago that B.C. teachers personally spend about \$1,095 each per year on such resources – the highest amount in the country.¹³ There is virtually no difference between elementary and secondary teachers in this regard, with about 83% of secondary and 86% of elementary teachers viewing inadequacy of learning resources as a source of low, medium, or high stress.

Table 17: Effects of inadequate learning resources by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 2.6% | 1.1% | 0.0% | 1.9% |
| None/neutral | 11.6% | 15.8% | 19.0% | 13.4% |
| Total stress | 85.9% | 83.1% | 81.0% | 84.7% |
| low stress | 30.2% | 30.6% | 28.6% | 30.3% |
| medium stress | 32.5% | 29.5% | 33.3% | 31.5% |
| high stress | 23.2% | 23.0% | 19.0% | 22.9% |
| <i>n</i> | 311 | 183 | 21 | 515 |

¹³ District trust funds: Learning resources, provincial education initiatives, and implementation training, 2001–02, available online at www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2003ei01 ; “Teachers subsidizing schools,” on the BCTF web site at www.bctf.ca/Research/list/archive/2000-01/2001-04-24.html .

Size of workload

About 9 out of 10 teachers (88.1%) cite size of workload as a source of low, medium, or high stress (Table 18). When broken down by level of stress caused, however, it is clear that elementary teachers are disproportionately affected: There is a 10-percentage-point spread, with 71% indicating their workload is a source of medium or high stress, compared to 61% of secondary teachers.

Table 18: Effects of size of workload by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 1.3% | 4.6% | 0.0% | 2.4% |
| None/neutral | 10.7% | 8.2% | 4.2% | 9.5% |
| Total stress | 88.1% | 87.2% | 95.8% | 88.1% |
| low stress | 17.3% | 26.0% | 29.2% | 21.0% |
| medium stress | 35.5% | 28.1% | 33.3% | 32.7% |
| high stress | 35.2% | 33.2% | 33.3% | 34.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 318 | 196 | 24 | 538 |

Foundation Skills Assessment

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is a set of standardized tests conducted every May on students in Grades 4, 7, and 10 by the British Columbia Ministry of Education¹⁴. FSA purports to measure reading comprehension, first-draft writing, and some aspects of numeracy. The ministry produces provincial, district, school, and individual student results. BCTF members have expressed concerns about the quality of the tests, the effect of the tests on students, and the misuse of results, for example by the Fraser Institute to rank schools.

By its nature, the FSA has a direct impact only on some teachers of Grades 4, 7, and 10; thus, a larger number of teachers than for many of the other factors answered “N/A” (not applicable) or omitted the question altogether. The result was a sample size of 319 (Table 19). A large proportion of those who responded (25.7%) also indicated “no effect/neutral” – an ambiguous response since it is unknown whether they are uninvolved in administering the test or whether they are simply neutral towards it. **Elementary and secondary teachers diverge greatly on this point: Nearly 40% of secondary teachers report no or neutral effects of the FSA compared to only 16% of elementary.**

With these caveats, however, the results indicate that 83% of elementary teachers and 55% of secondary teachers, or 71% of all teachers, cite the FSA as either a low-, medium-, or high-stress factor. Nearly one in three (30%) elementary teachers is highly stressed by FSA.

¹⁴ More information on FSA can be found at www.bctf.ca/education/assessment/, including a link to the Ministry of Education FSA pages.

Table 19: Effects of FSA by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 1.2% | 5.3% | 7.1% | 3.1% |
| None/neutral | 16.3% | 39.8% | 7.1% | 25.7% |
| Total stress | 82.6% | 54.9% | 85.7% | 71.2% |
| low stress | 30.8% | 27.1% | 50.0% | 30.1% |
| medium stress | 22.1% | 15.0% | 14.3% | 18.8% |
| high stress | 29.7% | 12.8% | 21.4% | 22.3% |
| <i>n</i> | 172 | 133 | 14 | 319 |

Provincial (Grade 12) exams

Grade 12 students must write provincial exams in certain courses in order to earn a Dogwood Diploma (school-leaving certificate). The provincial exam score is worth 40% of a student’s final course mark, while the school mark is worth 60%. Provincial exams, which directly affect only senior secondary teachers, therefore have a more limited impact than the FSA, which was discussed above. We therefore confined the analysis to secondary teachers only, resulting in a sample size of 114 (Table 20). One-quarter of secondary teachers report that provincial exams have “no effect/neutral”, again raising the spectre of ambiguity: Are they unaffected by provincial exams or are they involved but neutral towards them? Taking the results at face value results in **two-thirds (67.5%) of secondary teachers viewing provincial exams as low-, medium-, or high-stress while one out of every four secondary teachers views provincial exams as a high-stress factor.**

Table 20: Effects of provincial exams on secondary teachers

| Effect | <i>n</i> | % |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|
| Positive | 9 | 7.9% |
| None/neutral | 28 | 24.6% |
| Total stress | 77 | 67.5% |
| low stress | 22 | 19.3% |
| medium stress | 26 | 22.8% |
| high stress | 29 | 25.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 114 | 100.0% |

Relationships and attitudes

The following relationship and attitudinal variables were considered in this section:

relationships with students, relationships with other teachers, with Administrative Officers (AOs), with Teaching Assistants, and with parents; and attitude/actions of the public, of the school board, and of government; and media focus on education.

Relationships with students

As noted earlier, **most teachers (69.5%) view their relationships with students as a positive aspect of their work (Table 21), with slightly more elementary (73%) than secondary (66%) teachers holding this view. Altogether, 22% of elementary and 27% of secondary teachers view relationships with students as a source of stress, but most rate them as a source of low rather than medium or high stress.**

Table 21: Effects of relationships with students by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 72.6% | 66.2% | 58.6% | 69.5% |
| None/neutral | 5.8% | 6.9% | 10.3% | 6.5% |
| Total stress | 21.5% | 27.0% | 31.0% | 24.0% |
| low stress | 15.1% | 12.3% | 20.7% | 14.3% |
| medium stress | 3.7% | 11.3% | 10.3% | 6.8% |
| high stress | 2.8% | 3.4% | 0.0% | 2.9% |
| <i>n</i> | 325 | 204 | 29 | 558 |

Relationships with other teachers

About two-thirds of teachers (64.4%) see their relationships with other teachers as a positive aspect of their working lives, with more elementary teachers (68% versus 58%) expressing this sentiment (Table 22). Among the minority who perceive inter-teacher relationships as stressful, most indicate this is a low-stress matter.

Table 22: Effects of relationships with other teachers by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 68.2% | 57.7% | 69.0% | 64.4% |
| None/neutral | 8.3% | 12.0% | 6.9% | 9.6% |
| Total stress | 23.5% | 30.3% | 24.1% | 26.1% |
| low stress | 16.2% | 18.3% | 13.8% | 16.8% |
| medium stress | 5.5% | 6.3% | 10.3% | 6.0% |
| high stress | 1.8% | 5.8% | 0.0% | 3.2% |
| <i>n</i> | 327 | 208 | 29 | 564 |

Relationships with Administrative Officers

Almost half of teachers (48.2%) report that their relationships with administrative officers (AOs)¹⁵ are a positive aspect of teaching (Table 23). More elementary than secondary teachers are positive about their interactions with administrators (53% versus 39%). About 38% of teachers view their dealings with AOs as a source of stress, although the largest groups rate this factor low on the stress scale.

Table 23: Effects of relationships with Administrative Officers by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Positive | 52.8% | 38.8% | 61.5% | 48.2% |
| None/neutral | 10.9% | 16.8% | 19.2% | 13.5% |
| Total stress | 36.3% | 44.4% | 19.2% | 38.4% |
| low stress | 20.3% | 18.9% | 11.5% | 19.4% |
| medium stress | 10.6% | 16.8% | 7.7% | 12.7% |
| high stress | 5.3% | 8.7% | 0.0% | 6.3% |
| <i>n</i> | 320 | 196 | 26 | 542 |

Relationships with Teaching Assistants

Teachers are generally quite positive about relationships with Teaching Assistants (TAs)¹⁶, with 62% reporting their interactions with TAs are a positive aspect of teaching (Table 24). Furthermore, when this factor is stressful, it is generally low-stress (15% of teachers); nonetheless, about one in four (23%) of teachers experience some level of stress vis à vis their relationship with TAs, an effect that is slightly more pronounced for secondary teachers.

Table 24: Effects of relationships with Teaching Assistants by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Positive | 64.7% | 57.6% | 60.0% | 61.9% |
| None/neutral | 13.8% | 18.0% | 8.0% | 15.0% |
| Total stress | 21.5% | 24.4% | 32.0% | 23.0% |
| low stress | 13.5% | 18.6% | 12.0% | 15.2% |
| medium stress | 6.2% | 4.7% | 8.0% | 5.8% |
| high stress | 1.7% | 1.2% | 12.0% | 2.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 289 | 172 | 25 | 486 |

¹⁵ "Administrative Officers" (AOs), the terminology used in our survey instruments in Spring 2001, included principals, vice principals, and directors of instruction. The definition was repealed by Bill 34, the School Amendment Act, 2002. These educators are now correctly called "administrators."

¹⁶ Teaching Assistants (TAs) may also be known as Special Education Assistants (SEAs), Education Assistants (EAs) or a variety of other names. The key factor is that they work directly with students with special needs.

Relationships with parents

Four out of 10 teachers (39%) see their relationships with parents as a positive factor (Table 25) and there is virtually no difference between the two groups' reported experiences in relationship to parents; however, secondary teachers are more than twice as likely to indicate their relationship with parents has no effect or is neutral (16.2% versus 6.6%), perhaps because of less parental involvement at the secondary level. **Half of teachers experience stress in their relationships with parents, but it is for the most part ranked as low- or medium-stress.**

Table 25: Effects of relationships with parents by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 40.1% | 35.9% | 50.0% | 39.0% |
| None/neutral | 6.6% | 16.2% | 4.2% | 10.0% |
| Total stress | 53.3% | 48.0% | 45.8% | 51.0% |
| low stress | 28.7% | 26.8% | 37.5% | 28.4% |
| medium stress | 18.0% | 15.7% | 4.2% | 16.5% |
| high stress | 6.6% | 5.6% | 4.2% | 6.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 317 | 198 | 24 | 539 |

Attitude/actions of the public

About 10% of teachers are positive towards the effects of the public's attitude and actions, while about 20% are neutral towards them (Table 26). The remaining 70% find public attitude and actions to be a stressful influence, primarily low or medium. Secondary teachers are more likely to experience high stress, while elementary teachers are more likely to experience medium stress in response to this factor.

Table 26: Effects of attitude/actions of the public by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 10.4% | 8.7% | 21.7% | 10.3% |
| None/neutral | 19.3% | 21.4% | 21.7% | 20.2% |
| Total | 70.2% | 69.9% | 56.5% | 69.5% |
| low stress | 30.4% | 34.2% | 47.8% | 32.5% |
| medium stress | 28.8% | 19.4% | 8.7% | 24.6% |
| high stress | 11.0% | 16.3% | 0.0% | 12.5% |
| <i>n</i> | 326 | 196 | 23 | 545 |

Attitude/actions of school board

A small percentage of teachers is positive towards the actions and attitudes of their school board (6.9%) and one in five (21%) is neutral, but nearly three-quarters (72%) perceive their school board's actions and attitudes as stressful (Table 27). Secondary teachers are somewhat more likely to view school board actions and attitudes as stressful at any level (77% versus 70%) or as a high-stress factor (21.4% versus 17%).

Table 27: Effects of attitude/actions of school board by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 6.8% | 5.5% | 20.8% | 6.9% |
| None/neutral | 23.5% | 17.9% | 12.5% | 20.9% |
| Total stress | 69.8% | 76.6% | 66.7% | 72.1% |
| low stress | 25.9% | 25.4% | 41.7% | 26.4% |
| medium stress | 26.9% | 29.9% | 16.7% | 27.5% |
| high stress | 17.0% | 21.4% | 8.3% | 18.2% |
| <i>n</i> | 324 | 201 | 24 | 549 |

Attitude/actions of government

Most teachers (83%) find the attitudes and actions of government to be a source of stress, whether low, medium, or high (Table 28). More than half of teachers consider these actions and attitudes to be a high or medium source of stress. Overall there is little difference between elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions; however, **one-third of secondary teachers (34%) are highly stressed by government attitudes and actions, compared to just over one-fifth of elementary teachers (22%).**

Questionnaires were mailed out April 25, 2001, with a requested return date of May 11, 2002, five days before the B.C. Liberals' landslide victory on May 16. It is unclear, therefore, whether teachers were reacting to the platform and rhetoric of what would inevitably turn out to be the ruling party of the province, whether they were responding to policies of the previous NDP government, or whether the results are a combination of these factors.

Table 28: Effects of attitude/actions of government by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 2.1% | 1.0% | 8.0% | 2.0% |
| None/neutral | 13.8% | 16.5% | 16.0% | 14.9% |
| Total stress | 84.1% | 82.5% | 76.0% | 83.2% |
| low stress | 27.8% | 22.5% | 48.0% | 26.8% |
| medium stress | 33.9% | 26.0% | 16.0% | 30.3% |
| high stress | 22.3% | 34.0% | 12.0% | 26.1% |
| <i>n</i> | 327 | 200 | 25 | 552 |

Media focus on education

More than two-thirds of teachers (68.3%) are sensitive to the media’s focus on education, finding it a stressful factor in their working lives (Table 29). The remaining third are neutral or experience no effect (27.3%) or view media attention as positive (4.4%). Secondary teachers are slightly more sensitive to this factor than elementary teachers (71.8% versus 67.4%).

Table 29: Effects of media focus on education by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 4.3% | 3.6% | 11.5% | 4.4% |
| None/neutral | 28.3% | 24.6% | 34.6% | 27.3% |
| Total stress | 67.4% | 71.8% | 53.8% | 68.3% |
| low stress | 28.0% | 29.2% | 34.6% | 28.8% |
| medium stress | 23.7% | 26.2% | 15.4% | 24.2% |
| high stress | 15.7% | 16.4% | 3.8% | 15.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 325 | 195 | 26 | 546 |

Miscellaneous factors

Teachers were also asked to rate the following factors as positive, neutral, or a source of low, medium, or high stress:

- unmet needs of students
- salary
- lack of Teachers on Call (TOCs)
- child poverty and other social issues
- students from dysfunctional family environments
- other (open-ended)

Unmet needs of students

Teachers take the unmet needs of their students to heart: **More than 94% rate this factor as a source of stress, with 42% experiencing it as a high-stress factor** (Table 30). Somewhat more elementary teachers than secondary teachers feel this way (96.4% versus 90.7%). **Almost half of elementary teachers (48%) are highly stressed by their students’ unmet needs, compared to one-third of secondary teachers (33.3%).**

Table 30: Effects of unmet needs of students by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 0.9% | 1.0% | 0.0% | 0.9% |
| None/neutral | 2.7% | 8.3% | 3.4% | 4.8% |
| Total stress | 96.4% | 90.7% | 96.6% | 94.3% |
| low stress | 16.8% | 27.0% | 20.7% | 20.7% |
| medium stress | 31.5% | 30.4% | 51.7% | 32.2% |
| high stress | 48.0% | 33.3% | 24.1% | 41.5% |
| <i>n</i> | 333 | 204 | 29 | 566 |

Salary

Just over three-quarters (77%) of both elementary and secondary teachers view their salary as a source of low, medium, or high stress while about 8% of teachers are satisfied with their salary and about 16% are indifferent (Table 31).¹⁷ Secondary teachers are half again as likely as elementary teachers to respond to this factor with high stress (35% versus 23%).

Table 31: Effects of salary by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 7.6% | 7.2% | 8.3% | 7.5% |
| None/neutral | 15.4% | 15.5% | 16.7% | 15.5% |
| Total stress | 77.0% | 77.3% | 75.0% | 77.0% |
| low stress | 24.8% | 18.8% | 25.0% | 22.6% |
| medium stress | 29.6% | 23.2% | 25.0% | 27.0% |
| high stress | 22.7% | 35.3% | 25.0% | 27.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 331 | 207 | 24 | 562 |

Lack of Teachers on Call (TOCs)

We included this question because of field reports that professional development activities were cancelled in some districts because of a lack of teachers on call (TOCs), and that some schools were unable to replace teachers absent on sick leave. **Our results show that three-quarters of teachers experience stress because of lack of TOCs (Table 32). Elementary teachers are more likely to experience medium or high stress (43.7% versus 41.7%) or, conversely, no effect (23.7% versus 20.3%), than secondary teachers.**

Table 32: Effects of lack of TOCs by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 2.2% | 1.6% | 0.0% | 1.9% |
| None/neutral | 23.7% | 20.3% | 31.6% | 22.7% |
| Total stress | 74.2% | 78.1% | 68.4% | 75.5% |
| low stress | 30.5% | 36.4% | 36.8% | 33.0% |
| medium stress | 18.3% | 20.3% | 10.5% | 18.8% |
| high stress | 25.4% | 21.4% | 21.1% | 23.7% |
| <i>n</i> | 279 | 187 | 19 | 485 |

¹⁷ The survey was completed in the spring of 2001, about nine months before the B.C. government imposed a contract with Bills 27 and 28 (see www.bctf.ca/bargain/agreements/imposition/).

Child poverty and other social issues

The majority of teachers (84%) experience stress as a result of child poverty and other social issues (Table 33). The largest groups of both elementary and secondary teachers report low stress on account of this variable; however, elementary teachers have a higher propensity than secondary teachers for this factor to result in medium or high stress (54% versus 36.2%).

Table 33: Effects of social issues such as child poverty by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Positive | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| None/neutral | 12.4% | 22.6% | 3.8% | 15.7% |
| Total stress | 87.6% | 77.4% | 96.2% | 84.3% |
| low stress | 33.6% | 41.2% | 53.8% | 37.3% |
| medium stress | 27.6% | 20.1% | 26.9% | 24.9% |
| high stress | 26.4% | 16.1% | 15.4% | 22.2% |
| <i>n</i> | 330 | 199 | 26 | 555 |

Students from dysfunctional family environments

More than 95% of teachers experience stress resulting from the presence of students from dysfunctional family environments (Table 34). Secondary teachers are more likely to rate this source of stress as low than elementary teachers, who are more likely to rate it as high.

Table 34: Effects of dysfunctional family environments by teaching level

| Effect | Elem. | Sec. | Other | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Positive | 0.3% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.3% |
| None/neutral | 3.8% | 5.9% | 0.0% | 4.4% |
| Total stress | 95.9% | 93.6% | 100.0% | 95.3% |
| low stress | 21.1% | 29.1% | 26.7% | 24.2% |
| medium stress | 33.4% | 31.0% | 40.0% | 32.9% |
| high stress | 41.3% | 33.5% | 33.3% | 38.2% |
| <i>n</i> | 341 | 203 | 30 | 574 |

Other

The questionnaire provided space for teachers to write in an additional positive factor or source of stress, which 96 of 644 teachers, or 15%, completed. Of these, one was positive: *“Love the kids, love the job!”* The remainder fell into small numbers in each of 15 broad categories (Table 35):

Table 35: Other stress factors

| General category | Number | General category | Number |
|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------------------|--------|
| management | 17 | unreasonable expectations/work intensity | 4 |
| union | 10 | | |
| underfunding | 9 | inadequate support | 5 |
| curriculum | 8 | inclusion | 3 |
| external expectations | 8 | marking | 2 |
| socioeconomic issues | 8 | personal demands | 2 |
| salary/economic | 7 | prep time | 2 |
| colleagues | 6 | school facilities | 2 |

Within the general category of management, teachers reported concerns relating to administrative leadership, including lack of understanding of teachers’ needs or students with special needs, unresolved school-based problems, hiring practices, lack of disciplinary procedures, low morale and poor school climate, not being treated as professionals, parent and administrator input and control over the classroom, and difficult processes and red tape that make it difficult to get help for kids. School boards were also singled out for not sending in TOCs when necessary, resulting in teachers having to cover for one another. It should be noted that teacher-respondents wrote these concerns in, in addition to indicating stress from relationships with administrators.

Concerns with the BCTF were the next major category, albeit a small one, with 10 teachers writing in comments on the attitude and actions of the union, especially with respect to bargaining, a lack of focus, politicization, lack of union support, and concerns about threatened job action.

Underfunding, curriculum issues, external expectations, and socioeconomic issues were all of similar frequency. In the underfunding category, teachers mentioned problems with program funding as well as continual funding cuts to special education. Two teachers mentioned cuts to music programs, while others mentioned lack of materials and resources and the necessity of spending one’s own money without getting a tax write-off, and cutbacks of non-enrolling/specialist teachers such as teacher-librarians.

Curriculum-related issues include several mentions of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs), inadequate class time to teach the curriculum thoroughly, conflicts between professional notions of learning theory and the structure of IRPs, and the stress brought on by continually changing programs and the need to constantly learn new things.

External expectations include conflict related to parents, such as a general underrating of the role of parents in student success, as well as unrealistic goals of parents and conflicting responsibilities of parents and teachers. Other stressful external expectations include extracurricular activities, high-profile concerts involving all students, and accreditation.

Socioeconomic issues are dominated by concerns about violence, such as workplace violence, including physically and verbally violent students, bullying, student safety (abductions), and general student behaviour. Some teachers perceive a lack of discipline and decreasing respect in their schools, as well as issues with student attendance. Declining enrolments caused by socioeconomic conditions and resulting in families moving out of the province, are also stress factors for some teachers.

Lack of economic security and inadequate compensation are issues for a number of teachers. Some also cite lack of opportunity, availability of only part-time work, a reduction in their working time, difficulties related to being on the Salary Indemnity Plan, and working a split shift while only part-time.

Colleagues are a source of concern for some teachers. Teachers may feel isolated because of a lack of colleagues in their subject area, or may experience stress because of “unethical games” by other staff members. Support staff and care workers are other groups with whom teachers interact that may be a source of stress.

Complaints about inadequate support revolve around poor access to Learning Assistance, a lack of support staff, including well-trained Special Education Assistants (SEAs), and an inadequate counselling environment.

Some teachers also cited unreasonable expectations, such as deadlines, paperwork, too much report card preparation, and inadequate time for their role. Other comments revolved around inclusion, marking load, juggling work and personal commitments, and school facilities.

Changes in stress level

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

One of the more alarming results of this survey is that three-quarters of teachers (75.2%, n=472) had a higher stress level in 2001 than five years earlier (Table 36). Somewhat more secondary teachers report higher stress (78.5% versus 75.3%). About 18% report it was about the same and 16% say that it had changed but not necessarily increased or decreased. There was very little difference between elementary and secondary teachers’ responses in these two assessments. There was some divergence, however, among those who report less stress: 7% overall, but 8% of elementary, and 4% of secondary teachers. **Elementary teachers are nearly twice as likely to report lower stress between 1996 and 2001 than secondary teachers.** Further examination of the raw data (specifically “Grades Taught”) could determine whether this effect is confined to primary teachers, who were affected by reduced class sizes in the Provincial Collective Agreement.

Table 36: Change in stress level over 5 years, elementary and secondary teachers

| Direction of change | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Increased | 75.3% | 78.5% | 57.6% | 75.2% |
| Decreased | 7.9% | 4.1% | 18.2% | 7.2% |
| Stayed same | 16.9% | 17.4% | 24.2% | 17.6% |
| Changed | 15.7% | 16.3% | 12.1% | 15.7% |
| <i>n</i> | 267 | 172 | 33 | 472 |

Note: Excludes those who responded N/A or did not respond.

Job satisfaction

Some teachers have indicated that their satisfaction with teaching as a career has changed over time. 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

Four of every ten teachers (38.4%) found their jobs in 2001 less satisfying than five years earlier, while 18% reported no change, 19% were more satisfied, and 25% indicated a change but not necessarily an increase or decrease in job satisfaction (Table 37). Secondary teachers are somewhat more likely to experience lower job satisfaction (42% versus 37%) or a value-neutral change (20% versus 17%), while elementary teachers are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction (20% versus 16%) or no change (26% versus 22%).

Table 37: Change in job satisfaction level over 5 years, elementary and secondary teachers

| Direction of change | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Increased | 20.0% | 16.2% | 21.6% | 18.7% |
| Decreased | 37.1% | 41.9% | 29.7% | 38.4% |
| Stayed same | 25.7% | 21.7% | 18.9% | 18.4% |
| Changed | 17.1% | 20.2% | 29.7% | 24.5% |
| <i>n</i> | 315 | 198 | 37 | 550 |

Note: Excludes those who responded N/A or did not respond.

Reasons for declining job satisfaction

To examine several hypotheses about why teachers' job satisfaction might have declined, teachers who indicated their job satisfaction had decreased or changed were asked to specify to what extent, if any, the following factors had contributed: Limited flexibility in approach to work; little chance to be creative; no new challenges in teaching; and limited opportunities for district-level jobs.

This analysis – which looks at the 211 teachers (elementary, secondary, and other) who stated their job satisfaction had *declined*, and only at those who responded to each factor – indicates that the hypotheses are of limited value in explaining declining job satisfaction among teachers: Few teachers responded that any of the factors affected the change in their job satisfaction level *significantly*, with those who indicated an impact generally classifying it as affecting their job satisfaction *to some extent* only. Write-in responses, on the other hand, were varied and reflected a constellation of frustrations, many of which were covered elsewhere in the survey, such as student behaviour, issues with administration, and inadequate salary. This qualitative information is ripe for further analysis.

In terms of the four factors we suggested, **limited flexibility in approach to work** was the only factor cited by a large contingent of teachers (76.8% of 164 teachers) and few were emphatic – most said “to some extent” (56.7%) (Table 38). This factor was followed by **little chance to be creative** (54.9% of 166) and **limited opportunities for district-level jobs** (52.7% of 129), with **no new challenges in teaching** cited by a smaller group (42.3% of 149).

Secondary teachers identified **limited flexibility in approach to work**, **little chance to be creative**, and **no new challenges in teaching** to a greater extent than elementary teachers, while about half of each group cited **limited opportunities for district-level jobs**. Elementary teachers were more likely, however, to say the last factor affected their decline in job satisfaction significantly.

Table 38: Contributions of various factors to decline in job satisfaction level over 5 years

| Factors | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Limited flexibility in approach to work | | | | |
| Not at all | 27.2% | 18.5% | 14.3% | 23.2% |
| Significantly | 18.5% | 23.1% | 14.3% | 20.1% |
| To some extent | 54.3% | 58.5% | 71.4% | 56.7% |
| <i>n</i> | 92 | 65 | 7 | 164 |
| Little chance to be creative | | | | |
| Not at all | 52.9% | 39.1% | 20.0% | 45.2% |
| Significantly | 14.9% | 15.9% | 10.0% | 15.1% |
| To some extent | 32.2% | 44.9% | 70.0% | 39.8% |
| <i>n</i> | 87 | 69 | 10 | 166 |
| No new challenges in teaching | | | | |
| Not at all | 65.8% | 45.2% | 75.0% | 57.7% |
| Significantly | 10.1% | 16.1% | 25.0% | 13.4% |
| To some extent | 24.1% | 38.7% | 0.0% | 28.9% |
| <i>n</i> | 79 | 62 | 8 | 149 |
| Limited opportunities for district-level jobs | | | | |
| Not at all | 49.3% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 47.3% |
| Significantly | 10.1% | 16.7% | 50.0% | 14.7% |
| To some extent | 40.6% | 33.3% | 50.0% | 38.0% |
| <i>n</i> | 69 | 54 | 6 | 129 |

Note: Percentages are of those who responded to each question.
 In each case, excludes those who responded N/A or did not respond.

Work effects and coping strategies

Effects of work life on personal life

We asked each respondent to identify if their working life had had any of five specific effects on their personal life: Fatigue, loss of time with family or friends (recalling that Whitehall II and other studies have identified strong social support as a key factor in well-being), loss of time for personal interests or hobbies, less interest in other areas, and health problems. *Table 39* displays the results: **A key finding of this study is that 84% of teachers report fatigue resulting from work. Nearly 90% of secondary teachers (88.5%) and 82% of elementary teachers report fatigue. This discrepancy merits more investigation. In addition, this descriptor of the population can now be compared to similar results for other occupations.**

Two-thirds of teachers (66.1%) report loss of time for personal interests or hobbies owing to work commitments; this factor also affects secondary teachers disproportionately (71.7% versus 62.9%). Loss of time with family or friends is also a major effect, having an impact on over six of every ten teachers (61.2%). Although both groups experience significant impacts, secondary teachers are much more affected than elementary teachers (69% versus 56.5%).

Health problems resulting from teaching are identified by almost four in ten teachers (37.3%). Again, this is a very significant result, and one that should raise alarm bells, especially since this is a cross-sectional design; the proportion is likely to increase as the teaching force ages.

The results were virtually the same for both elementary and secondary teachers.

***Less interest in other areas* affects about one in four teachers (23.9%). Elementary and secondary teachers were similarly affected.**

Respondents were also able to identify other effects in a write-in field. This information merits further study; however, an initial scan indicates issues related to mental health including depression, burnout, and other mood disorders, negative effects on the family, including increased stress and divorce; and attitudinal effects such as cynicism.

Table 39: Effects of work life on personal life

| Effect | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Fatigue | 82.4% | 88.5% | 74.4% | 84.0% |
| Loss of time for personal interests or hobbies | 62.9% | 71.7% | 65.1% | 66.1% |
| Loss of time with family or friends | 56.5% | 69.0% | 60.5% | 61.2% |
| Health problems | 36.5% | 36.7% | 46.5% | 37.3% |
| Less interest in other areas | 23.5% | 25.7% | 18.6% | 23.9% |
| <i>n</i> | 375 | 226 | 43 | 644 |

Coping strategies

We asked teachers to rate the effectiveness of six coping strategies: Engaging in exercise; pursuing hobbies; receiving support from family and friends; taking sick leave; working reduced hours; and relaxation techniques. Teachers also had the opportunity to write in and rate up to two other coping strategies. While there are obviously individual factors at play, the results may be of use to other teachers who are feeling the effects of stress.

The largest numbers of teachers responded to the questions about *engaging in exercise* and *receiving support from family and friends* (Table 40), which were also judged to be the most effective means of coping with stress and the other wear and tear wrought by teachers' working lives. Combining "moderately effective" and "very effective," seven out of ten teachers recommend each of these coping strategies (71.3% and 69.8% respectively). **The strategy judged next most effective was *pursuing hobbies*, which was rated moderately or very effective by six in ten teachers (60.8%).** The remaining three strategies were rated by a much smaller number of teachers; this is no surprise for *taking sick leave* and *working reduced hours*, as they are not common strategies for dealing with stress unless a crisis point is reached. Relatively few respondents – approximately one-third – provided a rating for each of these options (33.5% and 29.3% respectively). Among those who responded, *taking sick leave* was deemed moderately or very effective by less than half of teachers (46.8%), while *working reduced hours* seemed to be a viable strategy for seven of ten teachers (68.8%). Almost half of teachers appeared to have some experience of using *relaxation techniques*, but only 56% rated them as moderately or very effective.

Table 40: Effectiveness of coping strategies

| Coping strategies | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Overall n | 375 | 226 | 43 | 644 |
| Engaging in exercise | | | | |
| not effective | 1.0% | 2.7% | 0.0% | 1.5% |
| somewhat effective | 29.8% | 26.6% | 30.3% | 28.7% |
| moderately effective | 32.7% | 31.9% | 27.3% | 32.1% |
| very effective | 36.5% | 38.8% | 42.4% | 37.7% |
| n | 315 | 188 | 33 | 536 |
| Pursuing hobbies | | | | |
| not effective | 6.3% | 6.0% | 0.0% | 5.8% |
| somewhat effective | 30.0% | 36.1% | 46.7% | 33.4% |
| moderately effective | 36.8% | 31.9% | 30.0% | 34.5% |
| very effective | 26.9% | 25.9% | 23.3% | 26.3% |
| n | 253 | 166 | 30 | 449 |
| Receiving support from family and friends | | | | |
| not effective | 2.6% | 4.5% | 3.2% | 3.3% |
| somewhat effective | 22.7% | 29.9% | 25.8% | 25.4% |
| moderately effective | 28.6% | 26.6% | 32.3% | 28.1% |
| very effective | 46.1% | 39.0% | 38.7% | 43.2% |
| n | 304 | 177 | 31 | 512 |
| Taking sick leave | | | | |
| not effective | 14.3% | 11.8% | 21.4% | 13.9% |
| somewhat effective | 38.9% | 36.8% | 57.1% | 39.4% |
| moderately effective | 23.0% | 28.9% | 14.3% | 24.5% |
| very effective | 23.8% | 22.4% | 7.1% | 22.2% |
| n | 126 | 76 | 14 | 216 |
| Working reduced hours | | | | |
| not effective | 6.3% | 14.8% | 0.0% | 8.5% |
| somewhat effective | 22.7% | 22.2% | 28.6% | 22.8% |
| moderately effective | 25.0% | 24.1% | 14.3% | 24.3% |
| very effective | 46.1% | 38.9% | 57.1% | 44.4% |
| n | 128 | 54 | 7 | 189 |
| Relaxation techniques | | | | |
| not effective | 4.9% | 7.6% | 0.0% | 5.5% |
| somewhat effective | 38.4% | 40.0% | 30.4% | 38.4% |
| moderately effective | 23.8% | 27.6% | 47.8% | 27.1% |
| very effective | 32.9% | 24.8% | 21.7% | 29.1% |
| n | 164 | 105 | 23 | 292 |

Note: Percentages are of those who responded to each question. In each case, excludes those who responded N/A or did not respond.

Other than *engaging in exercise*, which was ranked similarly by both elementary and secondary teachers, and *taking sick leave*, which secondary teachers more often rated as “moderately effective,” elementary teachers generally report more success with the specified coping strategies.

The written-in coping strategies merit further analysis, as they appear to provide a window onto the ways in which teachers handle the stresses of their work. Some of the common techniques specified include use of medications such as alcohol and anti-depressants; spiritual practices such as prayer, attending church, or engaging in alternative practices such as Tai Chi,

meditation, or yoga; “using vacations for vacations”¹⁸; and trying to keep a philosophical perspective.

Conditions that could ameliorate workload and stress levels

Teachers were asked to rate whether three conditions would have a positive effect on their workload and/or stress levels: Better resources (more time, funding, and staff directed to support your teaching), better organization (how teaching is organized at the school level), and better professional support. Teachers were also given the opportunity to write in two responses. The results indicate that *better resources* are the factor that, in the view of teachers, would have the most positive effect on teachers’ workload and stress levels (Table 41), with more than seven in ten teachers saying such resources would have a significant positive effect (72.2%) and a further 24% saying they would have a moderate positive effect. Nine out of ten teachers (89.3%) called for *better professional support*, while similar but slightly lower proportions called for *better organization*. Elementary teachers were more likely than secondary teachers to think that better resources and better professional support would have a significant positive effect on their workload and stress levels, while secondary teachers were more likely than elementary to believe that better organization would be useful.

Table 41: Teachers’ ratings of conditions that could ameliorate workload and stress levels

| Conditions | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| <i>Overall n</i> | 375 | 226 | 43 | 644 |
| Better resources (more time, funding, and staff directed to support your teaching) | | | | |
| No effect | 3.6% | 3.0% | 3.0% | 3.4% |
| Moderate positive effect | 21.2% | 26.1% | 45.5% | 24.4% |
| Significant positive effect | 75.2% | 70.9% | 51.5% | 72.2% |
| <i>n</i> | 330 | 199 | 33 | 562 |
| Better organization (how teaching is organized at the school level) | | | | |
| No effect | 15.2% | 11.5% | 10.0% | 13.5% |
| Moderate positive effect | 49.6% | 51.0% | 50.0% | 50.1% |
| Significant positive effect | 35.2% | 37.6% | 40.0% | 36.4% |
| <i>n</i> | 230 | 157 | 20 | 407 |
| Better professional support | | | | |
| No effect | 8.6% | 14.3% | 11.1% | 10.7% |
| Moderate positive effect | 44.1% | 51.7% | 51.9% | 47.3% |
| Significant positive effect | 47.3% | 34.0% | 37.0% | 42.0% |
| <i>n</i> | 245 | 147 | 27 | 419 |

Note: Percentages are of those who responded to each question. In each case, excludes those who responded N/A or did not respond.

Absence because of illness or disability

We asked teachers to identify the number of days or months they were absent from work in the 2000–01 school year because of illness or disability. Teachers were asked to respond “N/A” if they were TOCs, or if they were on leave but not because of illness or disability. Overall, 7.6% of teachers were excluded from the analysis on this account – more at the elementary level than the secondary level (8.4% versus 4.9%).

¹⁸ See “How I spent my summer vacation”: Time-use data from the Spring 2001 BCTF Worklife of Teachers Workload issues and stress survey, later in this report, and online, at www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc04/.

Unfortunately, we are unable to state how many teachers used *no* sick days, as the first option provided was “0-5 days.” It is into this slightly ambiguous category of **less than five days that more than two-thirds of teachers fall** (67.6%), with a much larger proportion of secondary than elementary teachers reporting the lowest number – 72% versus 64%. Secondary teachers are very slightly more likely than elementary teachers to take 6 to 10 days (17.1% versus 17.5%), but elementary teachers are more likely to take all other categories of sick days. These results should be examined controlling for age to see if it is a confounding factor. **Overall, 5.8% of teachers used at least one month of sick leave in the 2000–01 school year; elementary teachers were more than twice as likely as secondary teachers to use large amounts of sick leave (7.1% versus 3.3%).**

Table 42: Absences because of illness or disability

| Absences | Elementary | Secondary | Other | Total |
|---------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 0 to 5 days | 64.1% | 72.2% | 74.3% | 67.6% |
| 6 to 10 days | 17.1% | 17.5% | 8.6% | 16.7% |
| 11 to 15 days | 8.8% | 6.1% | 8.6% | 7.8% |
| 16 to 20 days | 2.9% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 2.0% |
| >1 mo. but <2 mos. | 2.4% | 1.9% | 2.9% | 2.2% |
| >2 mos. but <3 mos. | 1.8% | 0.0% | 2.9% | 1.2% |
| >3 mos. but <4 mos. | 0.6% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| >4 mos. but <5 mos. | 0.9% | 0.5% | 2.9% | 0.9% |
| >5 mos. but <6 mos. | 0.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.3% |
| >6 mos. but <7 mos. | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.2% |
| <7 mos. but <8 mos. | 0.6% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| <i>n</i> | 340 | 212 | 35 | 587 |

Note: Excludes those who did not respond or who responded “N/A” (mostly TOCs or those on leave but not because of illness or disability).

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this survey add to the body of research about the working conditions of various occupations and professions – in this case teachers in general, and in British Columbia in particular. It is also hoped that school boards, parents, locals, the provincial government, and others interested in the health of the public-education system, will use them to improve the working and learning conditions of teachers in this province.

The data provided by teachers in this study of workload and stress tell a story of a system already under stress, even before the cutbacks that resulted from policies implemented by the B.C. Liberal government after their 2001 landslide election. The information generated by this study therefore represents a baseline that can be used to assess the impacts of such policies, particularly if surveying is repeated in several years. **There are also implications for teacher supply and demand, a complex area that is highly susceptible to changes in government policy and extremely vulnerable to an ageing workforce.**

The data from this study are rich and not yet fully mined. For example, it would be appropriate to view different results by factors such as gender, age, region, number of years taught, type of employment contract, or subject area, and to perform more sophisticated analyses, such as

controlling for age, for example. **It is therefore recommended that the data from this and the other two studies that made up Worklife 2001 (workload of secondary English teachers, and Special Education) be made available to other researchers.**

The collective wisdom gleaned on the effects of a stressful work life on personal life, and on effective coping strategies, has implications for the wellness programs that are more and more often made available to teachers.

School boards may wish to assess the differences that emerged between the experiences of elementary and secondary teachers to modify requirements for the two groups, such as those related to report cards.

If surveying is repeated in several years (and this is recommended) or replicated in other jurisdictions, as has already been the case, the researchers may wish to consider adding some fields, such as class size or caseload and access to specialist teacher support, so these factors can be correlated with stress factors. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers be asked to rate their own teaching-related stress levels overall.

Appendix

See Appendix, following this page, for the survey instrument, *BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload issues and stress*, April 2001.