

BCTF Research Report

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SECTION III
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Teachers on Call in British Columbia: A BCTF Research Survey Spring 1999

www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/99WLC05

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Executive Summary

The British Columbia Ministry of Education routinely collects demographic, salary, and other data about full- and part-time contract teachers in the B.C. public education system. Comparable information for teachers on call (TOCs)– known elsewhere as substitute or supply teachers– is limited to the results of a BCTF Research study conducted in late 1992 and published in 1994.

The present survey–completed by almost 900 of the more than 5,000 active TOC members of the BCTF–sought to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge of TOCs.

Demographics

Gender: About 80% of TOCs are women, compared to about two-thirds of contract teachers. The gender difference is most pronounced between TOCs prepared to teach at the elementary and secondary levels. Nearly 90% of TOCs who were prepared to teach only elementary or middle school were female, compared to less than 60% of those prepared to teach secondary.

Age: The age distribution of TOCs implies that they will be available to assume the jobs vacated by retiring teachers, all other things being equal. With a median age of 38, TOCs are 7 years younger on average than contract teachers. Of those TOCs who want continuing teacher work, 34% are under 30, compared to 10% of contract teachers.

Marital status and dependants: About two-thirds of TOCs are married or living common-law. The majority have no children; 15% have one child, 18% have two children, and 9% have 3 or more children. About 15% of TOCs are lone parents.

Under-represented groups: About 7% of TOCs report they are members of a visible minority group, compared to 18% of the B.C. population. Less than 2% report having a disability that cannot be corrected. Less than 1% report First Nations status, compared to just under 4% of the B.C. population.

Mobility: Only about 1 in 4 TOCs is willing to move to acquire a continuing teaching position. TOCs' marital status is a significant factor: almost 40% of non-attached TOCs would be willing to move, compared to 15% of TOCs who are married or living common-law. Gender is also significant: almost one-third of men are willing to move compared to one-fifth of women.

Among those willing to move, the most popular destinations were Metro East, Vancouver Island South, and North and South Okanagan. Least popular were Peace River, Central Mainland, North Coast, South Coast, East Kootenay, Fraser Valley, and North Central. While these results are based on small numbers, they do indicate a disturbing trend about the future availability of teachers for rural areas as well as the

high-growth Fraser Valley. Only about 1 in 10 TOCs would be willing to move to another province or country to take a teaching job.

Average earnings and employment

In 1997–98, TOCs worked an average of 73 days, about two-fifths of the school year. They earned an average of just over \$11,000, about one-fifth of the average teacher's salary.

Men earned about 10% more than women; similarly, those who wanted continuing teaching work earned about 10% more than those who wish to remain a TOC (career TOCs). TOCs in the Lower Mainland earned almost half again as much (\$14,135) as those outside the Lower Mainland (\$9,920), a direct result of the number of days worked. Lower Mainland TOCs worked an average of 93 days compared to the 63 days worked by TOCs in the rest of the province.

Student loans

More than 60% of TOCs are free of student loan debt. Of the 40% with some debt, however, the average is over \$15,000— nearly \$4,000 more than the average TOC earns in a year.

Qualifications

TOCs' credentials compare favourably to those of contract teachers: 88% hold a professional certificate or an interim professional certificate, compared to 90% of contract educators. Of those who want a full-time continuing position, 92% hold a professional or interim professional certificate.

Three-quarters of TOCs are in TQS salary categories 5 or 6 (80% of contract teachers). The proportion rises to 81% when only those TOCs wishing a full-time position are considered. A larger proportion of career TOCs are in salary categories 3 and 4: almost half, compared to 19% of TOCs who wish to be employed full-time and 20% of contract teachers.

Approximately one-half of TOCs received their teaching certificate within the last 3 years: about 3 in 10 TOCs were certificated in 1998 or 1999, while another 2 in 10 were certificated in the previous two years.

Multiple TOC lists

The norm is for TOCs to be on only 1 TOC list (76%). About 19% were on 2 lists and 5% were on 3 or more lists. More TOCs in the Lower Mainland are on multiple lists: 69% are on 1 list, 25% are on 2 lists, and about 6% are on 3 or more lists.

Work history and preferences

The average TOC has taught on-call for just under 4 years. Those wanting full-time work average 3.2 years compared to 6.2 years for career TOCs.

In the year before the study, about 40% of TOCs surveyed had been working as a TOC. About 17% had been in school; 12% had had other employment; 7% had been a TOC with a part-time term or continuing appointment; 5% came from family responsibilities; about 3% had been teaching outside B.C.; and about 1% had been unemployed.

Three-quarters of TOCs would like a continuing teaching position. Over 60% want more TOC work than they are currently getting— an average of 43 days more.

The average TOC has applied for more than 11 positions in 2½ years. Those wanting full-time teaching averaged 15 applications in that time frame.

Elementary/secondary

Just under two-thirds of TOCs have teacher preparation at the elementary level only. This is somewhat more than the 58% of enrolment at the elementary level.

Call-out

About 1 in 4 TOCs finds it necessary to own a cell-phone for call-out purposes. The median time that TOCs must wait for an assignment each day is 2.75 unpaid hours.

Other TOC issues

TOCs keenly miss professional development opportunities; many would be willing to take a teacher education refresher course.

TOCs yearn for constructive feedback on their classroom performance. They feel acutely isolated and cut off from the school system.

Most TOCs believe that TOCs face major obstacles when trying to obtain teaching appointments. The obstacles they identify include: isolation, favouritism in hiring, funding cutbacks and declining enrolments resulting in fewer positions, and age discrimination against older teachers. There is also a sense of betrayal: having accepted that they would need to work as a TOC for several years before becoming eligible for a full-time position, many now feel stigmatized and stereotyped as “just a TOC.”

The report ends with a recommendation that a cross-divisional BCTF group with TOC representatives be struck to examine the data and generate policy advice.

Acknowledgments

The survey instrument was developed with input from staff of the Bargaining, Professional Development, and Research and Technology divisions of the BCTF; members of the Teacher on Call Advisory Committee; members of the provincial Teacher Supply and Demand Committee; and excluded staff and elected officers of the Federation.

Joanne Enquist of Computer Services capably designed the Teleform questionnaire; she and Anne Field of BCTF Research scanned and verified the data. Anne also managed the monitoring of nearly 900 surveys.

Appreciation is due especially to all the teachers on call who took the time to complete and return the lengthy survey.

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Teachers on Call in British Columbia: A BCTF Research Survey Spring 1999

Background

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation is interested in understanding the needs of its teacher-on-call (TOC) members in order to develop and improve services such as professional development activities, bargaining strategies, and projections of the future supply of and demand for teachers in British Columbia. While the Ministry of Education provides extensive demographic, salary, and other data about full-time and part-time contract teachers, our knowledge of TOCs is very limited. Besides anecdotal reports, the main source of information has been a BCTF Research study conducted in late 1992.¹

In 1998, planning began for a follow-up study after an examination of Member Records data indicated there were more than 5,500 active TOCs and almost 9,500 inactive TOCs (defined as teachers who had been TOCs at one time but had not paid Federation dues for at least six months).² Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 additional teachers had a secondary TOC code, indicating they probably held part-time contracts and wanted more work.

A survey instrument was devised, adapting a number of questions from the 1992 survey and adding other questions to reflect changing concerns of BCTF members and staff. Many individuals and groups provided feedback, including the Teacher-on-Call Advisory Committee, the provincial Teacher Supply and Demand Committee, the Bargaining and Professional Development Divisions of the BCTF, and excluded staff

¹ John D. Malcolmson, Teachers on Call in British Columbia, BCTF Research Report 94-WLC-03 (November 1993) (www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/94WLC03).

² Anne C. (Anny) Schaefer, Who Are the Teachers of British Columbia?, BCTF Research Report 98-TD-01 (August 1998) (www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/98TD01), p. 8. The number of TOCs in BCTF's Member Records system varies from month to month: These figures are based on September 1997 data. Analysis of Member Records data from December 1998 indicates: more than 5,500 "regular" TOCs (the sample frame for this survey); an additional 2,250 TOCs who were not yet signed up (whom this survey did not reach); more than 10,000 "inactive" TOCs; more than 3,800 inactive TOCs who had never signed up with a BCTF local; and more than 5,700 teachers who had a secondary code of TOC, indicating they probably had part-time teaching positions but wanted more work. The 2 inactive codes include teachers who had not worked as a teacher for at least 6 months; these numbers have been accumulating since about 1989.

and elected officers of the Federation. The survey was prepared for electronic data entry using Teleform software.

Survey instrument

Contact BCTF Research at 604-871-2251, 1-800-663-9163 local 2251, or afield@bctf.bc.ca to receive a copy of the survey instrument.

Sample

To ensure adequate coverage of both Lower Mainland and outlying areas, BCTF Research asked Computer Services to create two large random selection files of active TOCs³ from the Member Records system. The goal was to obtain enough returns in each group to ensure statistical significance⁴. Respondents received a self-addressed return envelope plus a cover letter from BCTF President Kit Krieger requesting TOCs' co-operation in completing and returning the survey by March 31. On March 4, 1999, a total of 2,467 surveys were mailed out; *Table 1* summarizes the mail-out and returns.

Table 1 - Survey mail-out and returns

Area of Residence	Number of TOCs (Code SY, Feb./99)	Surveys Mailed	Responses Required for 95% Confidence Interval⁴	Responses Received	Response Rate
Lower Mainland (Shool Districts #35 to #45 inclusive)	1,973	1,230	333	369	30%
Outside L. Mainland (all other districts)	3,560	1,237	364	478	39%
No SD provided				14	
TOTAL	5,533	2,467	375	861	35%

³ Member code SY: "Teacher on Call, certificated, paid fees in last 6 months." TOCs who were not yet signed up and part-time teachers who secondarily teach on call were not included in the sampling frame.

⁴ Greg Tyndall, *A General Guide to Survey Design* (3rd Edition), Independent Research and Management Consultants (1994), p. 45. A 95% confidence level is defined as a range of plus or minus 5%, 19 times out of 20.

BCTF Member Records data for February 1999 indicate that about 36% of TOCs reside in the Lower Mainland; in our sample, that proportion was about 44%, indicating some oversampling from the Greater Vancouver area.

Demographic profile

Gender

About 80% of TOCs are women, compared to about 66% of the contract teaching force.⁵ To a great extent, this probably reflects the current makeup of teacher education programs; however, the proportion is somewhat greater than the approximately 70% of new contract educators hired each year who are female.⁶

There is little difference in the proportions of TOCs who are female inside (78%) and outside (80%) the Lower Mainland. An interesting difference emerges, however, when TOCs' teacher education preparation is considered along with gender. Of those who reported their teacher education preparation, nearly 90% of those who were prepared to teach only elementary or middle school were women, compared to less than 60% of those prepared to teach secondary.

Age

A significant finding of this survey is the actual age distribution of teachers on call. If it were similar to that of contract teachers, large numbers of TOCs would not be available to fill positions vacated by retiring teachers. If TOCs are younger than regular teachers, however, we can expect them to have more working years left until retirement; they could thus be called upon to assume contract positions for a reasonable period of time.

The results show unequivocally that teachers on call are younger than contract teachers. TOCs' median age (38) is 7 years less than that of contract teachers. *Table 2* provides more dramatic evidence: While only 10% of contract teachers are under 30, 27% of TOCs fall in that age group. When only those TOCs who want continuing teaching work are considered, however, the proportion under 30 rises to 34%. Looked at another way, almost 30% of contract teachers are 50 or older compared to about 15% of TOCs who want continuing teaching positions.

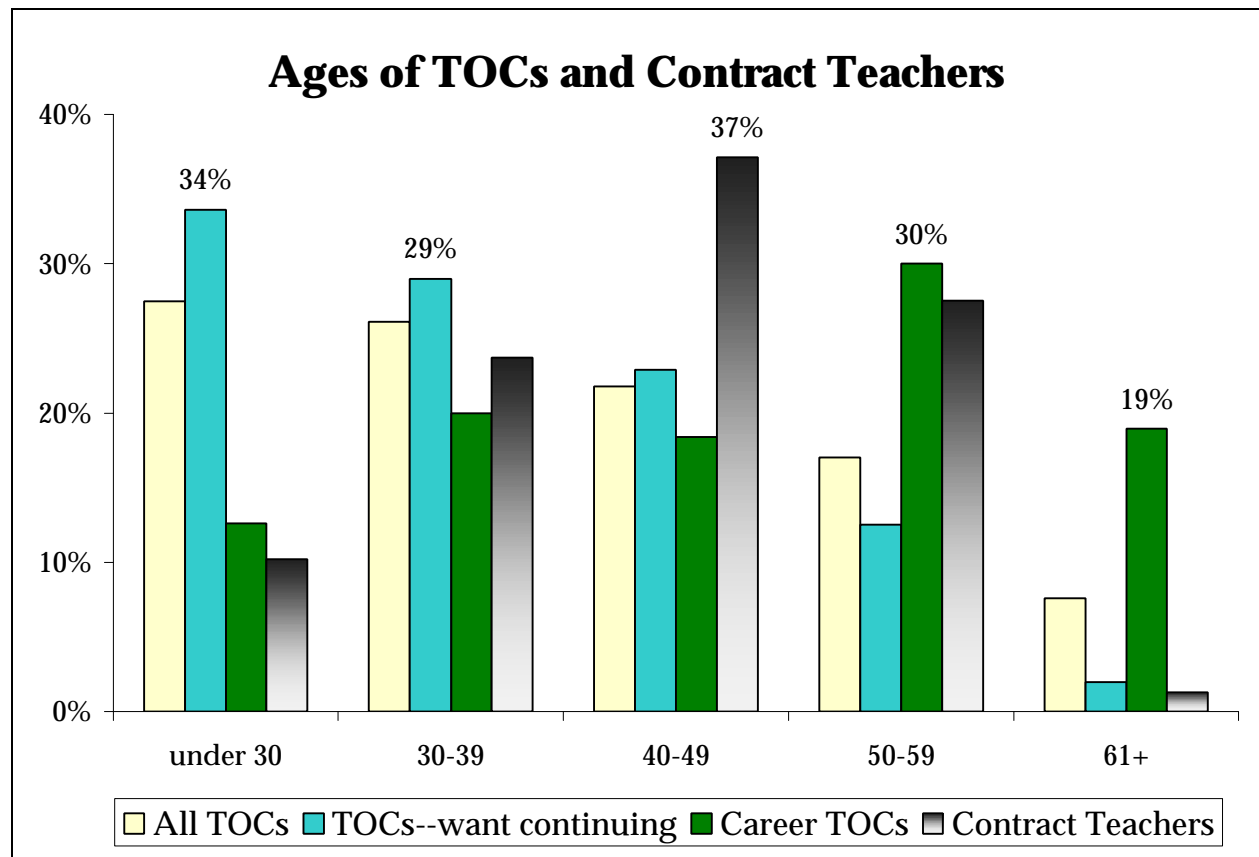
⁵ B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Report 2063 (September 1998). Contract teachers are those who have a full- or part-time contract with one or more school districts.

⁶ Anne C. (Anny) Schaefer, Who Are the Teachers of British Columbia?, BCTF Research Report 98-TD-01 (August 1998) (www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/98TD01), p. 46; B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Report 2081A (September 1998).

Table 2 - Age distribution

Age group	All TOCs		Want continuing teaching work		Wish to remain TOC ("career TOC")		Current contract teachers ⁷	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
under 30	221	27%	188	34%	24	13%	3,715	10%
30-39	210	26%	162	29%	38	20%	8,606	24%
40-49	175	22%	128	23%	35	18%	13,469	37%
50-59	137	17%	70	13%	57	30%	9,994	28%
61+	61	8%	11	2%	36	19%	504	1%
Total	804	100%	559	100%	190	100%	36,288	100%

TOC numbers are samples only. Percentage totals may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

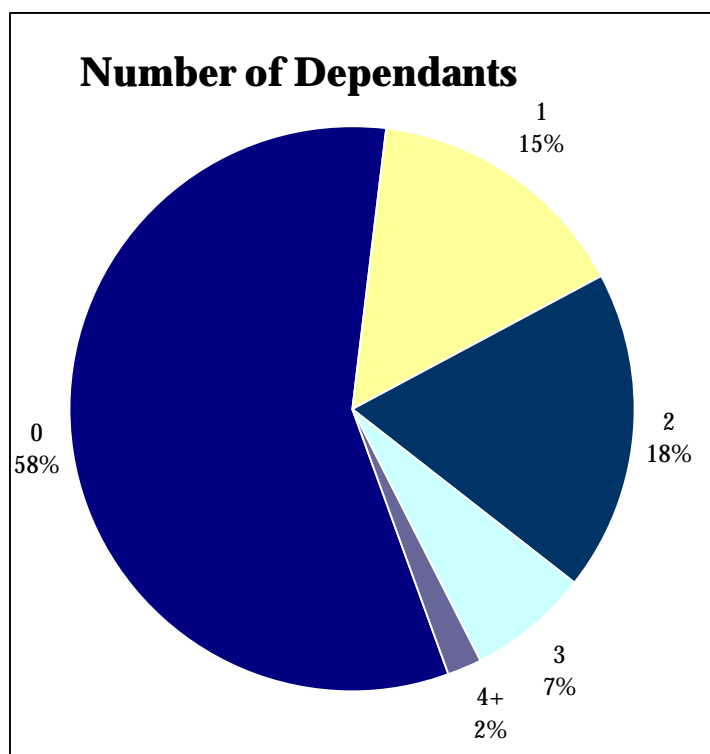


⁷ B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Report 2059 (September 1998). Excludes administrative officers (AOs); 51 teachers who work in more than one district are counted for each district in which they work.

Marital status and dependants

Family commitments are important determinants of TOCs' mobility and willingness to move, as well as important (though contradictory) indicators of TOCs' financial requirements. Potential TOCs with heavy financial commitments may never become TOCs or, if they do, may not last very long, so they may not be represented in this study. The 1999 TOC survey provides information about marital status and number of dependants; unfortunately there is no comparable information for contract teachers.

About two-thirds of TOCs are married or living in common-law unions; the remaining third are single or divorced.



Economic factors, high education levels, and age are important factors in deciding whether and when to start a family. More than half of all TOCs have no dependants, while more than half of married TOCs do have children at home. About 15% of TOCs have one child, 18% have two children, and 9% have three or more children. About 15% of TOCs are lone parents.

Under-represented groups

The survey included a question regarding visible minority and other under-represented group status. These results should be used with caution as the questions could be considered intrusive and sensitive by many people. Of the 861 respondents, 149 identified themselves as members of one or more of the specified groups. About 7% are members of visible minorities, compared to about 18% of the B.C. population.⁸ Similarly, about 7% consider that their education or career has been affected by their gender; while these TOCs are mostly female, many are male. A tiny minority— about 2½%— report that their education or career has been affected by a refugee/immigrant experience. A smaller minority report that they have a disability that cannot be

⁸ Statistics Canada, "Visible minority population, 1996 Census," <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Population/demo40c.htm> .

completely compensated for by a technical aid such as glasses or a hearing aid (about 1¾%). A very small proportion of TOCs report First Nations/Métis status. In the 1996 Census, First Nations people made up just under 4% of B.C.'s population.⁹ Less than 1% reported that their career had been affected by their sexual orientation (0.7%).

Mobility

Asked whether they would be willing to move in order to acquire a continuing teaching position, about one-third of those who provided an answer replied in the affirmative. If we assume that those who did not answer were unwilling to move, the proportion of TOCs who are willing to move drops to about one-quarter.

Marital status plays an important role in mobility: almost 40% of single or divorced TOCs would be willing to move compared to 15% of TOCs who are married or in a common-law living arrangement (again assuming that those who did not respond were unwilling to move). Gender also plays a role; 32% of male TOCs are willing to move for a continuing teaching position compared to 20% of females.

The most popular first choices were Metro East, Vancouver Island South, and the North and South Okanagan.¹⁰ The least popular areas were the rural districts comprising Peace River, Central Mainland, North Coast, South Coast, East Kootenay, and North Central as well as the Fraser Valley.¹¹ These results are based on small numbers and therefore should not be taken too literally; however, they do provide an indication of trends. Rural areas may suffer if TOCs are unwilling to move there. Also of concern is the lack of interest in moving to the high-growth Fraser Valley.

About half of those willing to move (almost 12% of all TOCs) would be willing to move to another part of Canada. About 1 in 10 would move to another country to take a teaching position.

⁹ Statistics Canada, "Population by Aboriginal Groups and Sex, Showing Age Groups, for Provinces and Territories, 1996 Census - 20% Sample Data British Columbia, 1996 Census", <http://www.statcan.ca/english/census96/jan13/bc.htm>.

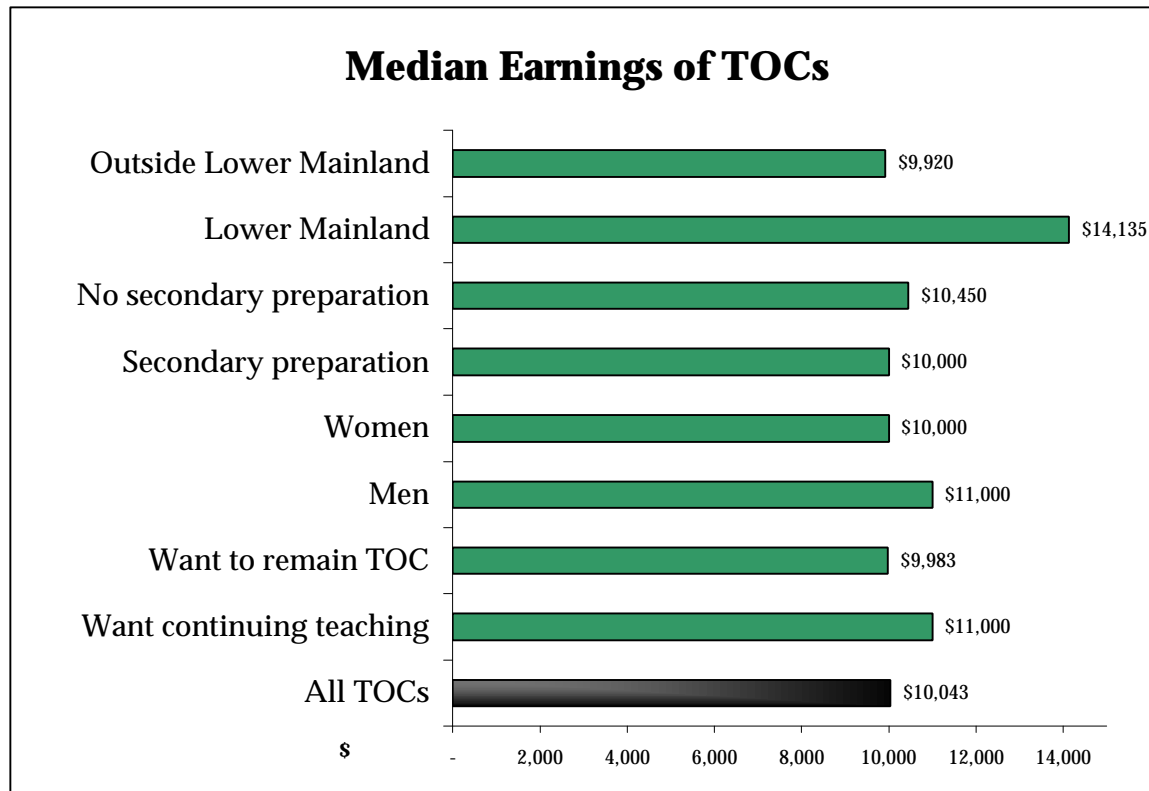
¹⁰ Metro East: Langley, Surrey, Delta, Richmond, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, and Coquitlam. Vancouver Island South: Greater Victoria, Sooke, Saanich, Gulf Islands, and Cowichan Valley. North Okanagan: Revelstoke, Vernon, Central Okanagan, North Okanagan-Shuswap. South Okanagan: Okanagan-Similkameen, Nicola-Similkameen, Okanagan Skaha.

¹¹ Peace River: Peace River South, Peace River North, Fort Nelson. Central Mainland: Kamloops-Thompson, Gold Trail. North Coast: Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte, Prince Rupert, Bulkley Valley, Coast Mountains, Stikine, Nisga'a. South Coast: Sunshine Coast, Powell River, Howe Sound, Central Coast. East Kootenay: Southeast Kootenay, Rocky Mountain. North Central: Cariboo-Chilcotin, Quesnel, Prince George, Nechako Lakes. Fraser Valley: Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Mission, Fraser-Cascade.

Average earnings and days of employment

TOCs' average earnings in the 1997–98 school year were \$11,375¹², about one-fifth of the average full-time teacher's salary of \$53,730.

TOCs' median earnings were just over \$10,000. About 10% of TOCs earned more than \$21,000 a year while 25% earned more than \$16,250; another 25% earned \$5,000 or less.



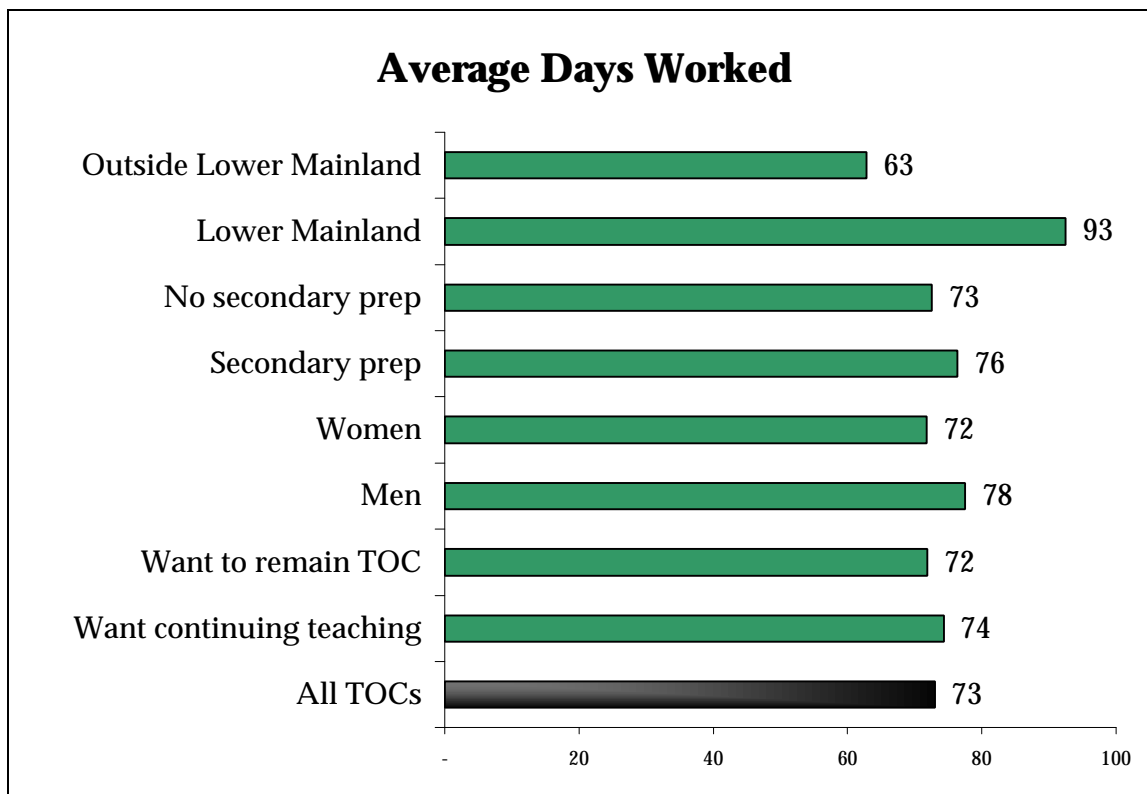
TOCs who want a continuing teaching position earn slightly more (median \$11,000) than those who prefer to remain TOCs (just under \$10,000). Similarly, men's median earnings from TOC work at \$11,000 are 10% more than women's (\$10,000). Median earnings of those TOCs who have some secondary preparation (not including middle school) are slightly less than those with no secondary preparation (\$10,000 compared to \$10,450).

A more noteworthy difference emerges between TOCs in the Lower Mainland (median earnings \$14,135) and those outside the Lower Mainland (\$9,920). This difference can perhaps be attributed to the fact that many TOCs in Greater Vancouver are on multiple TOC lists (see section below) and thus have more opportunity to be called out.

¹² The overall average in 1991–92 was \$8,466, less than 20% of the average teacher salary at the time.

Given the low level of earnings, it is not surprising that 4 out of 10 TOCs find it necessary to supplement their income with non-teaching work. About 40% of the income of these teachers comes from other employment. Men are more likely to supplement their income than women (about half of men, compared to 40% of women).

TOCs worked an average of 73 days in 1997–98, about 40% of the school year. There was no appreciable difference between number of days worked by those wanting a continuing teaching position and career TOCs. On average, men worked 6 days more than women and secondary teachers worked 3 days more than elementary. The most significant difference is between the Lower Mainland and outside the Lower Mainland: TOCs in Greater Vancouver worked half again as many days as those in the rest of the province.



Student loans

As shown in *Table 3*, 6 out of 10 TOCs have no student loan debt at this time. Of the 40% with some net debt (debt after loan remission program), the mean is about \$15,500 while the median net student debt is \$13,000. Recalling that median earnings of TOCs are \$10,000, this is a staggering debt load for new teachers to carry.

Table 3 - Student loan debt

Net Debt	Number	Percent
\$0 or missing	529	61
<=\$5,000	66	8
\$ 5,000-\$10,000	73	8
\$10,000-\$20,000	94	11
\$20,000-\$30,000	68	8
\$30,000-\$40,000	20	2
\$40,000-\$50,000	7	1
> \$50,000-	4	1
Total	861	100

Qualifications

Teachers on call have excellent credentials: 88% hold a professional certificate or an interim professional certificate, compared to 90% of contract educators.¹³ Of TOCs who want to work full-time as teachers, 92% hold a professional or interim professional certificate. Career TOCs differ in that 19% of them hold a standard certificate (usually meaning third- or fourth-year standing in a faculty of education, degree not complete), compared to 7% of TOCs who want continuing positions and 9% of contract teachers.

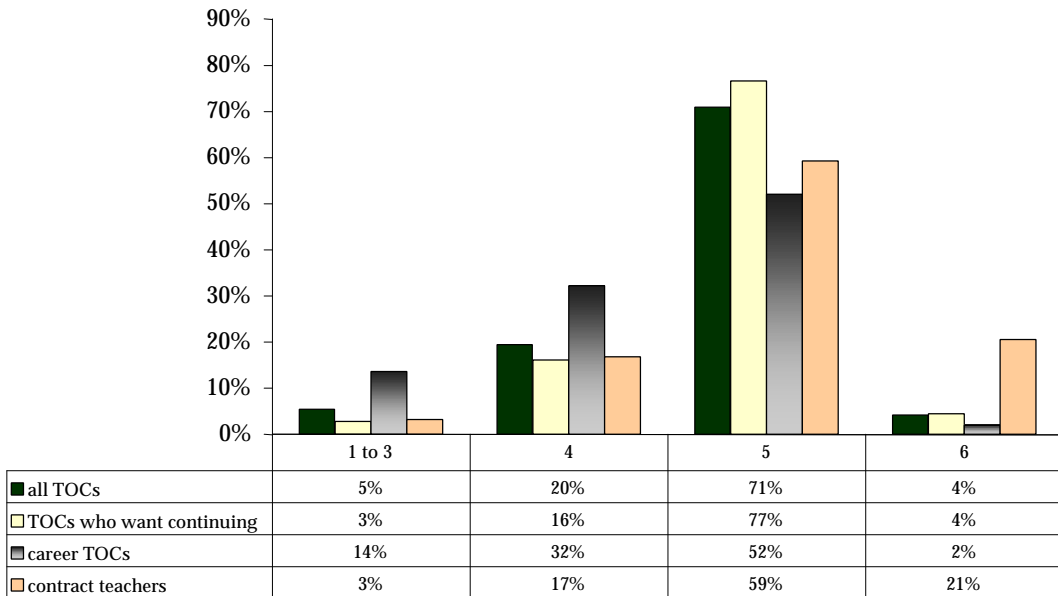
In terms of salary category, three-quarters of TOCs are in categories 5 or 6, compared to 80% of contract teachers.¹⁴ When only those TOCs wishing a full-time position are counted, the proportion rises to 81%. Only 54% of the minority career TOCs— those who prefer to remain a TOC— are in Category 5 or 6. Almost half are in categories 1 to 4, compared to 19% of TOCs who wish to be employed full-time and 20% of contract teachers.

Only a handful of TOCs report having restrictions on their certificates; in many cases the restriction is that the certificate is interim, usually meaning that the TOC is just about to complete teacher education.

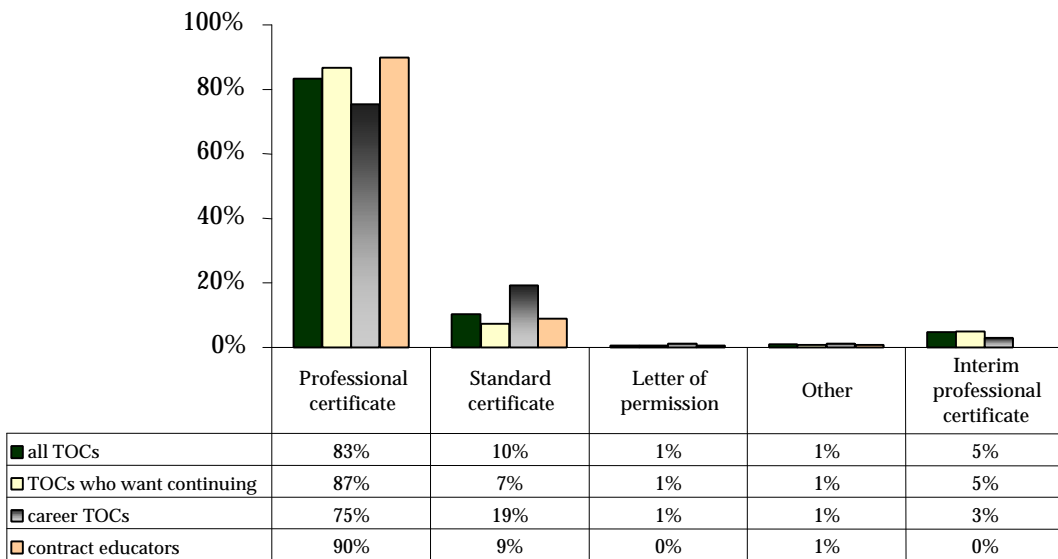
¹³ B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Report 2062 (September 30, 1998). Figures are for all educators, including administrative officers.

¹⁴ Contract teachers' data is from B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Report 2080 (September 30, 1998).

Salary Category of TOCs and Contract Teachers



Certificates Held by TOCs and Educators



About 3 in 10 TOCs received their teaching certificate in either 1998 or 1999. Another one-fifth were certificated in the previous two years.

Six of every ten TOCs would be willing to take a teacher education refresher course or program. Interestingly, those 30 and under—presumably the TOCs who graduated most recently—are the most eager: 69% of this group would take a refresher.

Multiple TOC lists

Of the 764 TOCs reporting being on a TOC list in 1998–99, three-quarters were on only 1 TOC list. About 20% were on 2 lists, 4% on 3 lists, and 1% on 4 or 5 lists. In the Lower Mainland, more TOCs are on multiple lists. While 69% are on just 1 list, 25% are on 2 lists, 5% are on 3 lists, and only a handful are on more than 3 lists.

Work history and preferences

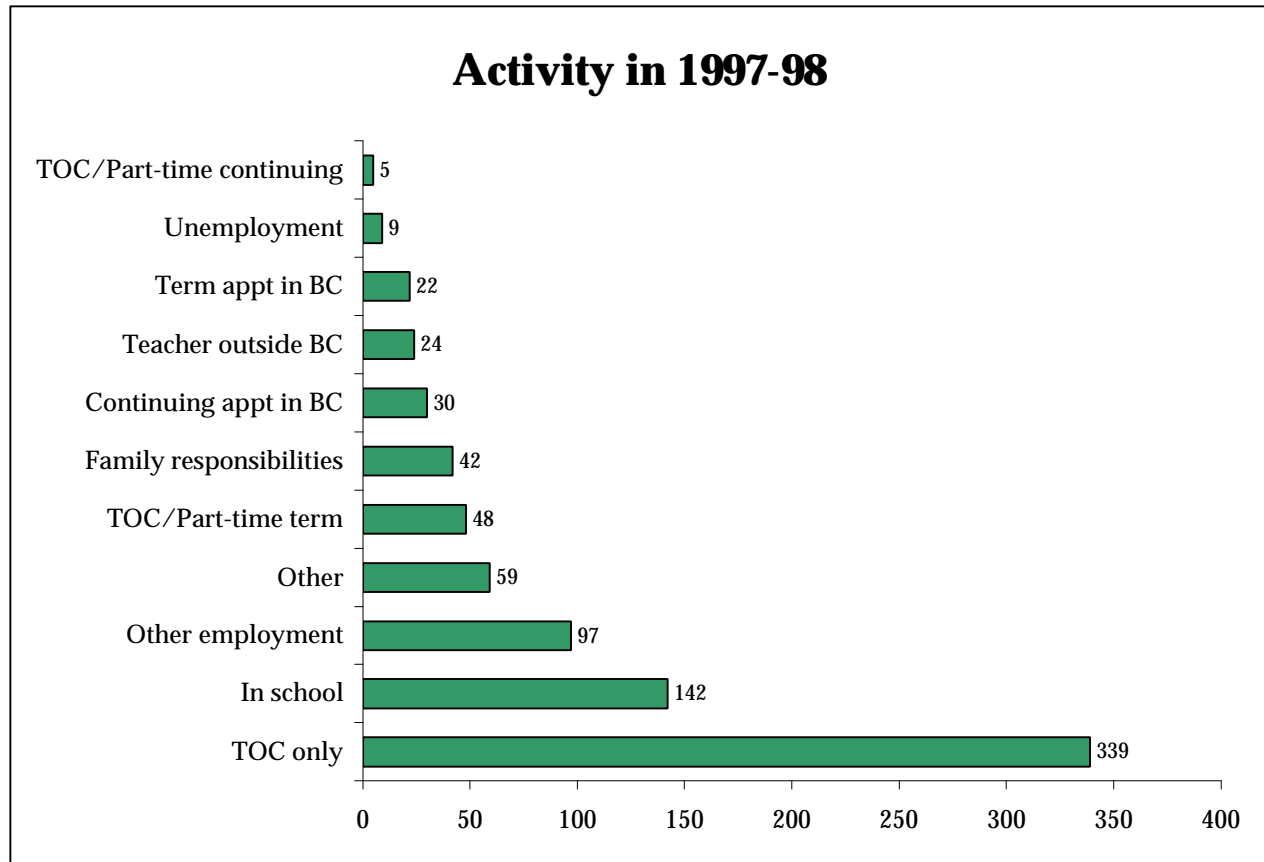
The average TOC has taught on-call for just under 4 years. (The median is 2.3 years.) Those who want full-time work have an average of 3.2 years of TOC experience compared to 6.2 for career TOCs.

In the year before the study, about 40% of TOCs surveyed had been working as a TOC. Another 7% had been a TOC with a part-time term or continuing appointment, and 7% had had continuing or term appointments in B.C. About 17% had been in school. About 12% had been employed outside of teaching, 3% had taught outside of B.C., 5% were engaged in family responsibilities, and 1% were unemployed.

About 1 in every 5 TOCs is re-entering teaching after a period of absence, while about 6% of TOCs are retired teachers.

Three-quarters of TOCs would prefer a continuing teaching position. This works out to about 70% of men and three-quarters of women. Removing retired teachers from the sample, 77% of women and 82% of men would prefer a continuing teaching position.

Just over half of TOCs report that they are seeking on-call work full-time, and **over 60% want more teaching work than they are currently getting.** On average, TOCs wanted 116 days of work, 43 days more than they were actually working. Those wishing a full-time position wanted 129 days while career TOCs wanted 93 days, on average.



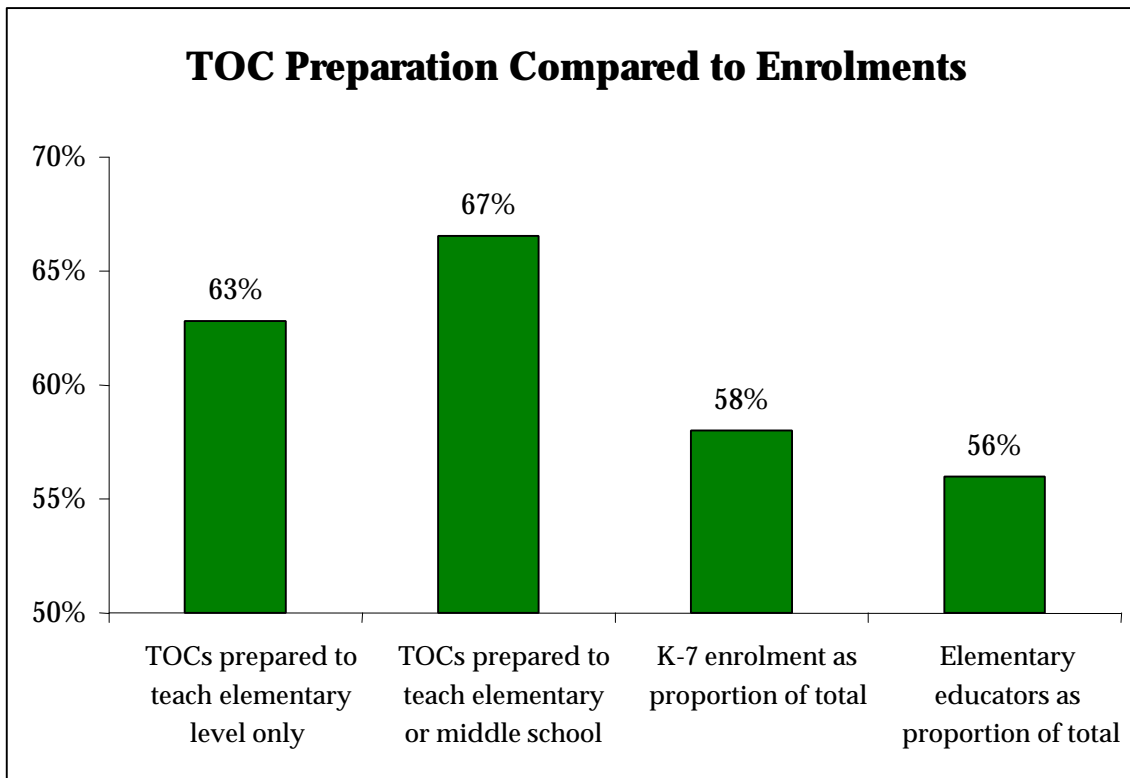
Since September 1996– a 2½-year period– the average TOC has applied for more than 11 positions. The median number of positions applied for is 5. Career TOCs averaged 2.5 applications (median 0) while those wanting full-time work averaged 15 (median 9).

About 12% of TOCs have worked in a private school in British Columbia for an average of 22 months (median 10 months). Nearly two-thirds of TOCs who want to work full-time would consider a position in a private school. Less than 5% of TOCs have ever taught in a B.C. band school.

Of the approximately 600 TOCs who prefer a continuing teaching position, about 80% were actively seeking a continuing teaching position at the time of the study in March 1999. These are active and energetic job-seekers. To support their job searches, they are volunteering (208), taking additional courses (201), engaging in community activities (180), and participating in a variety of other activities (121).

Elementary/secondary

Two-thirds of TOCs (63%) had teacher-education preparation at the elementary level only. Ministry data indicate that 58% of headcount enrolments and 56% of full-time equivalent educators are at the elementary level.¹⁵ In other words, TOCs at the elementary level appear to be over-represented; however, middle-school enrolments are not included in this analysis.



Call-out

About 1 of every 4 TOCs finds it necessary to own a cellular phone for call-out purposes.

The median time that TOCs are required to be “on call” (i.e., to wait for an assignment) is 2.75 hours per day, with a range of 0 to 24 hours. This time is uncompensated and may not lead to an assignment.

¹⁵ B.C. Ministry of Education, Standard Reports 1580 (headcount enrolments) and 2089 (educator FTEs) (September 30, 1998). School districts define middle schools differently; however, only 4% of TOCs report that they have some middle-school preparation.

Other TOC issues

Substitute teachers have, of course, become significantly elevated in my eyes. With a swift pen will I strike away any suggestion they should be deprived of preps, assigned extra supervision, or pay for coffee. I will always try to welcome them and check on them during the day, ensuring they have all they need. I will do everything I can to recognize them and enhance their status in the eyes of the profession.
–Vancouver principal Peter Bayley, after a year of subbing in Australia¹⁶

Professional development

TOCs are very keen on having access to professional development opportunities, particularly those related to curriculum in general and their specialties in particular. Results from the pertinent questions have been reported separately to the BCTF Professional Development Division.

Feedback

Many TOCs– especially those new to the profession– feel acutely isolated, cut off from the school system, and unable to move into a full-time position. Most TOCs are interested in receiving legitimate, clear feedback about their performance in the classroom, to enhance professional development and to support applications for continuing positions or more on-call work. Any feedback system should be sensitive to the difficulties inherent in TOC work.¹⁷

Obstacles

Almost two-thirds of all TOCs believe that there are major obstacles to TOCs obtaining continuing or term teaching appointments. Over 40% of those who wish to remain a TOC feel this way compared to about three-quarters of those who would like a continuing teaching position.

Among the obstacles mentioned: isolation; lack of clarity around hiring procedures; a perception of favouritism and nepotism in hiring; poor communication of postings; supply and demand issues, e.g., funding cutbacks, declining or stagnating enrolments, pools of unemployed or underemployed teachers all vying for the same limited number of positions, oversupply of new teachers, and cutbacks in non-core areas; and a sense that older teachers are discriminated against, perhaps because their experience makes them more expensive in some districts.

¹⁶ Peter Bayley, “One Journey’s End,” *Adminfo*, V. 12 (3) (BCPVPA, March/April 1999), p. 15.

¹⁷ Results on feedback and obstacles were reported separately to the BCTF Bargaining Division.

After being told that they could expect to work as a TOC for several years before having access to a continuing position, many TOCs now feel a sense of betrayal, saying that they have been stereotyped as “just a TOC”, “written off”, and “stale-dated.” They find it difficult to demonstrate their teaching skills as they are often trapped in managing classrooms under difficult circumstances, and they have few opportunities to develop skills such as lesson-planning.

Conclusion

Teachers on call in British Columbia are well-qualified, eager to practice their profession, and enthusiastic about professional development. Unfortunately, they often feel isolated from the school system and as if they are treated like second-class citizens. The large majority would prefer a continuing teaching position, and they apply often for part- and full-time teaching jobs. There is a sense, however, that TOC work is undervalued, certainly underpaid, and often not considered as experience. TOCs often feel overlooked in favour of new graduates and hence betrayed by a system that suggested they would be in the queue for a full-time position if they put in their time as a TOC for a few years.

Adequate education funding, well-thought-out early retirement incentive programs for contract teachers, and more respect for TOC work would go a long way toward improving opportunities, working conditions, and status of TOCs in British Columbia.

The current survey provides a rich data source for those interested in improving the working conditions of TOCs. Combining this information with the knowledge of TOCs in the field, and of staff from the BCTF’s bargaining, PD, and research divisions, would create a solid starting point for policy development for the coming years. It is therefore recommended that a group with representatives from these three divisions as well as TOC groups outside the building be formed to examine the working conditions of TOCs and to formulate policies on topics including bargaining objectives, professional development opportunities, and supply and demand issues.

Notes

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