

NWT TEACHER TIME AND WORKLOAD STUDY (2015) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



NWT TEACHER TIME AND WORKLOAD STUDY (2015)

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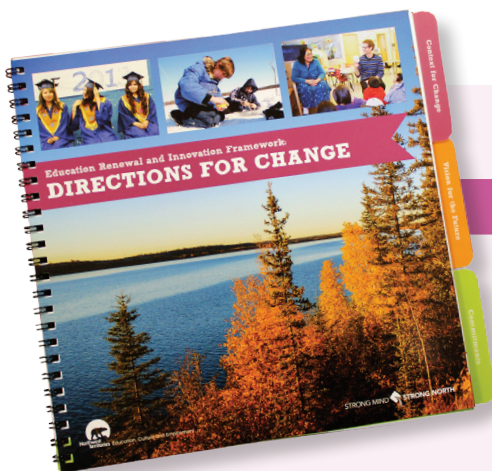
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BACKGROUND

In 2013, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) released a 10-year plan, the *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change*, outlining the Government of the Northwest Territories' commitment to large-scale educational change and innovation (Education Renewal). A key commitment in *Directions for Change* emphasizes the need to “ensure that educators have access to experiences and resources that enhance their wellness in order for them to focus on excellence in teaching” (p.36).

Education is at the heart of a strong, sustainable territory with healthy communities and residents. It is for that reason that teacher wellness is of significant concern to the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Research has repeatedly shown that teachers have the single greatest influence on student achievement. Teachers who are happy and healthy are in a better position to teach to their fullest ability, giving students a better chance to succeed in their studies and help them to pursue their interests and goals. This is why properly supporting teacher growth and wellbeing is essential to strengthening Northwest Territories' (NWT) schools. Through understanding and improving the working conditions of NWT teachers, students can be served better so that they may achieve better educational outcomes.



Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change

Directions for Change: **COMMITMENT THREE**

The GNWT will do its part to ensure that educators have access to experiences and resources that enhance their wellness in order for them to focus on excellence in teaching.

Why make this commitment?

A strong relationship exists between student achievement and teacher wellness and professional capacity. Current challenges must be addressed in order to support more equitable, high quality teaching across the NWT.

– Directions for Change, p.36

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DESIGN

The GNWT has made a commitment to enhance teacher wellness through the *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change*. In line with this commitment, ECE conducted an exploratory study beginning in early 2015 to gain insight into teacher workload and efficacy. This study was conducted to help inform programs, policies, and strategies developed through the *Education Renewal* initiative. The central aims of the study were to understand:

- the *amount of time* teachers spent working over a seven day period;
- the *allocation of time* to various work tasks; and,
- the factors within the school environment that affect teachers' *ability to work effectively*.

The *NWT Teacher Time and Workload Study* incorporates findings from a review of several Canadian workload studies, including the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) Workload Study (2013). The study included the development of a comprehensive survey, which incorporated feedback from both the NWTTA and the NWT Superintendents' Association and was issued in early 2015. This survey entitled *Study of Workload & Time Allocation: NWT Teachers and Teaching Principals* was completed by 112 NWT educators¹. Specifically, this survey captured a detailed breakdown of how respondents spend their time throughout the workday, as well as evenings and weekends. The survey also probed further into the nature of the workday, allowing respondents to report their levels of efficacy, incidence of behavioural/urgent issues, and the degree to which they were satisfied with the school day. Another prominent component of the survey was a series of qualitative 'end of week' questions, which investigated factors in the school environment that affected teachers' workload and their ability to work effectively.

Study of Workload & Time Allocation: NWT Teachers and Teaching Principals - Survey issued in early 2015

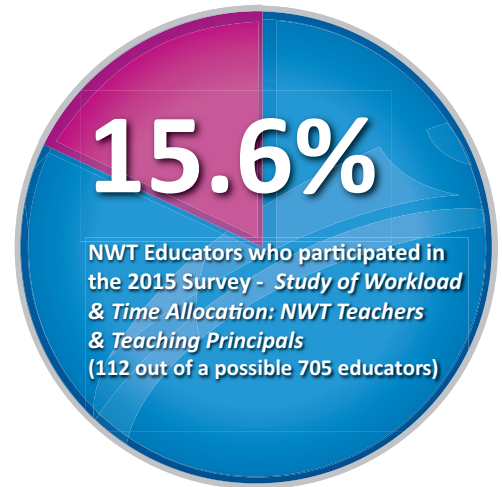
The image displays three overlapping survey documents. The top document is the cover page, titled 'Study of Workload & Time Allocation: NWT Teachers & Teaching Principals' and 'Department of Education, Culture and Employment'. It features a grid of photos of various educators. Below the photos is a section for 'NWT Education Renewal'. The middle document is a 'MONDAY' data sheet, and the bottom document is a 'TUESDAY' data sheet. Both data sheets have columns for 'Time', 'Activity Code', and 'Efficacy Code'. They include instructions for recording time and efficacy, and a section for qualitative feedback at the end of the day.

¹The term "educator" is used as a broad category to denote all types of educators in the NWT, including full-time and part-time teachers, principals, teaching principals, program support teachers, etc.

FINDINGS

RESPONSE RATE

A total of 112 (out of a possible 705) educators completed the survey, which accounted for approximately 15.6 percent of educators in the NWT at that time. Of these, 84 were *full-time teachers* with a corresponding response rate of 15 percent². Due to the small sizes of the other respondent groups (e.g. teaching principals, program support teachers), most of the analyses in this study were conducted solely on data pertaining to full-time teachers³.



ALLOCATION OF TIME

Full-time teacher respondents reported working a total of 52.2 hours on average over the course of a seven-day period.

Approximately 17.4 of these hours were documented as occurring *outside of the regular instructional day*⁴, during evenings and weekends.

Specifically, over half of the total time spent on planning, assessment, and reporting/communicating was reported as occurring *outside the instructional day*.

Teachers reporting the highest weekly work hours included respondents from Yellowknife, secondary school teachers, newer teachers (less than 6 years of teaching experience), and those with larger classes (20 or more students).

Respondents spent the majority of their time (approximately 70 percent) on core instructional duties, which included instructing, planning, assessing, and reporting/communicating.

The remaining 30 percent of the weekly work time was spent on non-instructional duties, including extra-curricular activities, meetings, supervision, attending school events, clerical, etc.

²A precise response rate for full-time teachers could not be calculated due to limitations in existing data collection systems. Hence, the figures reported here should be viewed as close approximations rather than precise measurements.

³Throughout the report, the term “respondents” is always with reference to full-time teachers unless otherwise stated.

⁴*Instructional Day* was defined as 8:00am-4:00pm Monday to Friday. Tasks completed outside of these hours were considered part of the non-instructional day.

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TEACHER EFFICACY

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they met their expectations for each work task throughout the day using the following three efficacy codes:

- 1: Did not meet personal expectations in quantity and/or quality of work;
- 2: Achieved what I feel is an accepted level;
- 3: Exceeded personal expectations in quantity and/or quality of work.

On average, respondents reported that they met or exceeded their personal expectations for 89 percent of time slots throughout the five day work week. Hence, reports of not meeting one's expectations were less frequent, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the workweek time blocks. Differences between groups (e.g. Yellowknife vs. small communities) were minor, though variation within groups was large. Therefore, the average (89%) cannot be regarded as being necessarily representative given the wide range in responses.

How to interpret Teacher Workload Factors data

Throughout the survey, teachers were asked about their opinion on many topics. Due to the fact that qualitative questions were open-ended (e.g. "Describe how and the extent to which students impacted your schedule"), it cannot be concluded that higher discussion of particular issues (e.g. behavioural issues) by one group necessarily means that those issues were more prevalent or problematic for that group.

The open-ended qualitative questions did not measure frequencies or prevalence of issues, but rather captured the main areas of concern that different groups prioritized in their responses".

TEACHER WORKLOAD FACTORS

Concerns with regard to teacher workload raised by respondents in the qualitative results pertained mainly to the following three areas:

- **time/work-related issues,**
- **supports, and**
- **student-related concerns.**

Time/Work-Related Issues

Over half of the respondents raised concerns related to work-life balance, with many noting the challenge of competing priorities and the ongoing balancing act of trying to meet both professional and personal needs.

Respondents stated the importance of having time to effectively fulfill their teaching duties. When asked to identify positive and negative factors that impacted their ability to work effectively, respondents commented on availability of time as having a positive impact when adequate time to meet work demands existed or was allocated, and a negative impact when it was absent. In particular, respondents frequently voiced the need to have adequate preparation time allocated within the school day.

The respondents who discussed time and workload factors the most were:

- respondents from Yellowknife and regional centres;
- moderately experienced teachers; and
- those with larger classes.

However, since *community type*, *years teaching*, and *class size* were highly interrelated variables, it is difficult to discern the underlying explanatory factor(s) related to group differences.

In school time to prep/plan is something that has positively impacted my ability to work effectively over this past week. This time before instruction helps me feel prepared and confident to deliver a lesson [and] allows for a positive transition between learning sessions.

— Anonymous NWT Teacher

I have prep time this semester (I didn't have any in semester 1) and this gave me more time to effectively plan quality lessons and practices. I strongly believe prep time needs to be given during the entire school year.

— Anonymous NWT Teacher

*Excerpts from Study of Workload & Time Allocation:
NWT Teachers and Teaching Principals*

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Supports

Support-related matters were discussed extensively by respondents and were mostly related to the following areas:

- administrator
- classroom
- parental support
- resources and technology
- peer support

Respondents often felt that there was a lack of administrator support, particularly in addressing student behavioural issues. Other concerns that were raised related to a perceived lack of leadership and poor morale within the school. However, views on administration varied considerably, with others describing positive relations with their administrator.

Classroom support, specifically the need for more support (i.e. in the form of education assistants and program support teachers), was another key issue raised by respondents. Some respondents also raised concerns regarding education assistants being inadequately trained.

Parental support was another key issue raised by respondents. In particular, respondents in small communities often commented on the lack of active involvement of parents in their children's school lives.

Failing technology, poor bandwidth, lack of internet access and of teaching resources were some of the resource-related issues brought up by respondents in small communities.

A key positive finding was that respondents commonly discussed the importance of *peer support* and relationships with colleagues. This was identified as positively impacting respondents' ability to work effectively, and approximately two thirds of the respondents regarded it as a valuable or energizing practice in their workplace.

Other commonly valued and energizing practices highlighted by respondents included:

- organizational practices,
- workplace culture,
- school activities, and
- relationships with students.

2 out of 3

Respondents reported
on the importance of
**peer support and
relationships with colleagues**
as a valuable or energizing
practice in their workplace.



Student-Related Concerns

Student-related matters were a central concern among respondents. The following areas received the greatest emphasis:

- behavioural issues,
- student needs,
- attendance, and
- student motivation/engagement.

Behavioural issues and student needs (e.g. needing extra academic support) were common themes discussed by respondents from Yellowknife, whereas student attendance and student engagement were discussed more often amongst respondents from small communities.

The amount of attention given to student-related issues also differed across levels of teaching experience. Respondents with the most experience (15 or more years) did not discuss student-related concerns as much as those with less experience.

Differences were also noted between elementary and secondary school teachers. Elementary school teachers tended to discuss behavioural issues more often, whereas secondary school teachers made greater reference to student needs.

Factors that negatively impacted my ability to work as effectively over the past week, included students arriving late to class [...] causing lesson plans and schedule to be interrupted and delayed. Low attendance also negatively impacted the dynamics and engagement level of some students.

— Anonymous NWT Teacher

Sporadic/poor attendance of some students disrupted the flow of instruction and/or planning this week (nearly every week). I am constantly adapting lessons and student work to ensure tardy and absent students do not fall behind.

— Anonymous NWT Teacher

*Excerpts from Study of Workload & Time Allocation:
NWT Teachers and Teaching Principals*

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DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The total average weekly work time reported by respondents in this study (52.2 hours) corresponds with the 50-55 hours commonly reported in other Canadian teacher workload studies (*BC Teachers' Federation, 2016*).

Key concerns mentioned in this study, as well as in other workload studies, include:

- the amount of time teachers spend outside of the regular instructional day on work tasks;
- classroom complexity (related to behavioural issues and student needs); and
- increased work demands, often related to reporting and non-instructional duties.

There is substantial literature on *work intensification* which argues that work demands for educators are growing *without the accompaniment of more time, support, or resources for them to adequately carry out their work functions* (*Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Wotherspoon, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994*).

The increase in demands, in turn, is deemed to result in increased stress and work-life balance concerns (*NWTTA, 2013; Naylor & White, 2009*).

While respondents in this study reported working an average number of hours that is typical of teachers in other Canadian jurisdictions, *it is still much higher than that of other public sector workers*. This speaks to the increasing workload demands being placed on teachers across Canada, as indicated by the substantial amount of literature published on this topic.

Findings from this study also revealed sizeable variation between groups in reporting on the amount of time spent on various work tasks, total weekly work time, and concerns related to factors in the school environment that impacted respondents' effectiveness and workload. In particular, the highest weekly work hours were reported by respondents from Yellowknife, new teachers, secondary teachers, and those teaching 20 or more students. These same groups, with the inclusion of moderately experienced teachers (as opposed to new teachers), also discussed workload concerns more frequently; however, ***the differences between groups on workload concerns should not be overstated, as they were drawn largely from open-ended qualitative questions, and reflect differences in the amount that particular topics were discussed as opposed true differences in occurrences (e.g. frequency of behavior issues).***

There were no notable differences in reported levels of teacher efficacy between groups, with respondents reporting on average that they did not meet their expectations for approximately 10 per cent of the work day time blocks; however, there was considerable variation, with some respondents reporting that they did not meet their expectations much more frequently.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were several limitations to the study, which affect the generalizability of the findings to the overall population of teachers in the NWT. First, given that the study accessed a small, volunteer-based sample, and captured teachers' activities for only one week of the school year (cross-sectional survey), the findings cannot be deemed representative of all full-time teachers in the NWT, or of different time periods in the year. Secondly, the time diary portion of the survey required respondents to report their work activities by coding a single activity in each 30-minute interval. The design did not allow for adequate capturing of multi-tasking; therefore, the amount of time spent on the various activities lacks precision. Another limitation was the operationalization of teacher efficacy, which arguably lacked robustness.

Future studies on teacher efficacy should be informed by the works of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), who have developed a tool with established construct validity, as well as the analytical framework outlined in the OECD (2014) TALIS report. Response bias was also a potential limitation as survey data was based solely on self-reports.

Finally, three of the four variables that were used for group comparisons (*community type, years teaching, and class size*) were highly interrelated, which limited the ability to discern explanatory factors that contributed to group differences. The open-ended qualitative responses also varied greatly, and were by their nature more prone to interpretation issues than quantitative results.

Despite these limitations, given the range of concerns addressed by respondents, the findings of this study will provide ECE and education bodies with a number of areas for consideration as ECE moves forward in developing policies, programs and initiatives associated with Education Renewal.

English

French

Cree

Tłchq

Chipewyan

South Slavey

North Slavey

Gwich'in

Inuvialuktun

Inuktitut

Inuinnaqtun

Francophone Affairs Secretariat: 867-767-9343