

High School Teachers' Perceptions of Their Working Environment in Newfoundland: A Grounded Theory Study

Selected Summary Highlights of the Report

- During the past decade the major causes of teacher stress have been attributed to workload, poor school ethos, the inclusion of students with special needs without adequate supports and resources, and behavior problems in regular classrooms.
- Workplace stress not only impacts teachers' health and well-being, but also the lives of their families and friends.
- After decades of research on teacher stress there is extensive information but little or no progress toward alleviating the problem. Teachers do not feel that they have an equal partnership in education; they feel overworked and unsupported. They report being excluded from the decision-making process and they want some autonomy. Teacher stress and resulting burnout is a serious problem that should be researched in a meaningful way if the quality and productivity of education is not to be weakened and if the health and well-being of teachers is to be taken seriously.
- Workload, class size, student behavior problems, inadequate administrative support, lack of professional training, lack of resources, teaching outside the area of specialization, time pressures, and evaluation apprehension have all been noted as issues of concern for teachers.
- Overloaded with paper work and facing increasingly larger classes, the problems inherent in inclusive classrooms, and the multiple role expectations, teachers expressed their concern not just for themselves but also for their students, who they felt experienced a loss when teachers felt less effective in the classroom and were physically and emotionally exhausted.
- Teachers expressed frustration about the rising demands and conflicting expectations not only from the Department of Education and board offices, but also from the public, who seem to expect them to manage all aspects of students' upbringing. Of primary concern to the teachers in the present study were the profound social and emotional needs many students bring to school.

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- Considering the barrage of educational policy changes and the increasing demands placed on teachers it is worrying that none of the previous responsibilities, such as supervision or extracurricular duties, have been reduced or eliminated.
- Personal time is becoming increasingly scarce outside of school for these teachers as they are faced with increasing demands to meet deadlines that cannot be accomplished within the scheduled instructional time.
- It is unfair to expect a teacher to teach technology courses with only half the computers in working condition and little technical assistance to repair broken equipment. It is not acceptable to expect teachers to purchase their own supplies or to expect students or teachers to study in classrooms designed for half the number of students. How inadequate resources can be justified by the Department of Education was difficult for teachers to understand and caused considerable frustration and anger. Failure to recognize the need for resources was perceived as a lack of respect for both teachers and students.
- Overloaded and bombarded with massive changes and unrealistic time demands, these teachers were feeling overwhelmed, helpless and powerless, exhausted and disillusioned. There was never enough time in their work day to accomplish everything that was expected of them. Their personal lives were eroded by the increasing demands of their job, which impacted their well-being, forcing many of them to reconsider their desire to continue teaching.
- Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource, one that needs to be supported and treasured.