



Evidence + Policy Research Group

## **The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) Teacher Workload and Professionalism Study**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Submitted to:**

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## Abbreviations

CTES	Collaborative Teaching Environment Scale
ASOS	Academic & Student Orientation Scale
TPS	Teacher Professionalism Scale
TES	Teaching Efficacy Scale
CCS	Classroom Challenges Scale
CDCS	Classroom Disciplinary Climate Scale
DPS	Differentiated Practice Scale
SSDMS	School Shared Decision Making Scale
SAS	Satisfaction Scale
PUPTS	Productive Use of Preparation Time Scale
PLNS	Professional Learning Needs Scale

## Executive Summary

In June 2013, the Government of Ontario and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) signed a memorandum of understanding that included an agreement " . . . to conduct a study of current and planned educational initiatives and student assessment at the provincial and school board level with a view to clearly focus such initiatives and assessments on student achievement, teacher workload, and teacher professionalism." Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group (*Directions*) was engaged by the Ministry of Education in October 2013 to undertake the aforementioned study and where feasible to align this study with a concurrent study of principal and vice principal workload. *Directions* was asked to:

- Define key concepts such as teacher workload and professionalism taking into account the Ontario context, including the Ontario College of Teachers Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession.
- Review the literature devoted to the conditions that support effective teaching and learning (with particular relevance to student achievement and well-being) and the implications for teacher work and workloads.
- Survey teachers concerning such matters as workload, professionalism, professional support, job and professional satisfaction, efficacy, the exercise of professional judgment and opportunities and barriers to effective implementation of Ministry and school board initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being within the context of teacher workload and professionalism.
- Illustrate successful instances of the evolution of professional teaching practices in relation to school, district and system improvement initiatives in Ontario that are perceived to have a positive impact on teacher satisfaction and not to have had an adverse impact on teacher workloads.
- Conduct in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, vice-principals, superintendents, directors and trustees to explore perceptions about the conditions that contribute to successful implementation of provincial and district initiatives and teacher job and professional satisfaction.

### Literature Review

The literature review conducted by Directions on the effects of centralized school reform on teacher workload and professionalism had several consistent themes. Reforms of any type, whether government or teacher initiated, generally lead to an increase and/or a perceived increase in teacher workloads. Successful reform initiatives must include mechanisms to manage teacher workloads. Teachers must be personally involved in the management of their workload and principals must provide appropriate support and leadership. Principals must guide teachers toward thinking systemically about reform efforts, and teachers must work

together in a critically collegial manner to hold each other accountable for ensuring that their efforts are directed toward ministry, school board, and school goals and plans, and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort.

While centralized school reforms can have a negative impact on teacher professionalism, the deskilling and de-professionalization widely predicted to be an inevitable outcome of standards based reform have not been widely observed. Teachers are less concerned with the specifics of government policy and much more concerned with the nature of reform implementation as it occurs within their particular contexts. Although they are not the only influence on reform implementation, principals play a critical role in mediating reform processes. When principals foster a culture of shared decision-making and of collegial collaboration among teachers, and when teachers feel that they are trusted to use their professional judgment in conducting their daily work, teachers retain a strong sense of professionalism.

### **Methodology**

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is an organization that represents approximately 76,000 teachers, occasional teachers, and education professionals employed in the public elementary schools of Ontario (<http://www.etfo.ca/aboutetfo/pages/default.aspx>). Using as its basis the 2008 survey developed by the Organisation for International Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the Teaching and Learning International Survey, Directions developed the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario Teacher Workload and Professionalism Survey. The ETFOTWPS was developed to gather information about matters such as workload, professionalism, professional support, job and professional satisfaction, efficacy, the exercise of professional judgment and to explore relationships among these and related matters.

Prior to full implementation, Directions piloted the survey with five ETFO members from across the various regions of the province to ensure that the terminology employed in the survey was aligned with the terminology familiar to prospective respondents. The field test proved helpful in identifying problems with the intended flow of the survey and in clarifying the intention of questions and response categories. More than 25 modifications were made to the instrument on the basis of the feedback provided during the field test.

Directions made the electronic survey available to all active ETFO members (census approach) from February 10, 2014 to March 14, 2014. Directions elicited the assistance of ETFO in distributing the survey link to its members and sought ETFO's assistance in encouraging its members to respond to the survey. The survey link was distributed through ETFO's local association to 56,642 members, an unknown proportion of whom were occasional teachers,

active full and part-time teachers, and teachers who were on leaves of absence of unknown duration.

Approximately 13.8% (7,841) of the 56,642 members for whom local associations had e-mail addresses responded to the survey. The average time spent on the survey was one hour and 10 minutes. Teachers were asked to indicate their employment status to identify those teachers employed on permanent full time contracts with no fixed end date, the group that, in this report is referred to as “respondents,” or “teachers” or “ETFO members.” Only 38% of those replying to the survey identified the school board with which they were affiliated. Directions weighted the responses so that the results accurately represent the characteristics of the population of which the respondents are a part, ensuring that the responses of all individuals were equivalent. Once weights were applied, the final data set included 2,774 weighted respondents.

Using the responses to the survey, *Directions* identified fifteen school boards based on the prioritized positive responses to several of the scales developed from the survey data, though the selection process was challenging as the differences among boards were very small. In these boards, Directions conducted board level interviews with the director or designated supervisory officer most knowledgeable about large scale board and ministry initiatives and an elected school trustee most knowledgeable about large scale board and ministry initiatives. From among the schools responding to the survey, *Directions* selected at random two schools in each board in which it conducted interviews with either a principal or vice-principal who has served in that school for no less than two years. Directions also conducted interviews with two teachers with five or more years of classroom teaching experience and two years of classroom teaching experience in the school. Interviews were conducted with all 15 directors of education or their designates, 13 trustees (of a possible 15), 30 principals, and 52 teachers (out of a possible 60).

## **Findings**

### **Findings from the survey data**

The average survey respondent was a 44 year old female with a 4 or 5 year university degree whose undergraduate major was in the humanities. She has taught for 15 years after three years working in other jobs after completing her university education.

As is the case with her colleagues elsewhere in Canada, she works, on average, 48 hours and 42 minutes in teaching related work each week. She spends more than 7 hours per week planning and preparing lessons in addition to the time she spends in the classroom and nearly 4 hours per week assessing, correcting, evaluating or marking student work. She also spends more than

two hours each in general administrative work, completing reports required by the principal, school board or ministry, and talking and working with her colleagues.

She feels she is well or very well prepared to address both the content and the pedagogical demands of her teaching assignment and is very confident about her abilities, especially her ability to get students to follow school rules, make her expectations about behaviour clear, provide alternative explanations, and use a variety of assessment strategies. Though the classroom is not entirely free of disciplinary challenges, she reports that students know the classroom routines and they try to create a pleasant learning environment.

She is among a large group of respondents who exhibit high levels of professionalism. They believe that teaching has a shared body of professional knowledge that should be common to all teachers and that having common professional standards in teaching is important. They also enjoy working collaboratively with their colleagues on school improvement initiatives and with them on professional learning.

She works in an environment that is collaborative one in which more than 70% of her peers say they share or exchange materials with other teachers from one to three times per month or more often, and discuss the learning development of their students at least one to three times per week. Her instructional and assessment practice and the practices of her colleagues are quite differentiated. She and her colleagues report using quite a few practices “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons,” including checking students’ work, observing students and providing immediate feedback, providing regular oral feedback in addition to a mark, administering assessments they have created, and using everyday problems to demonstrate why new knowledge is useful.

The school in which she works, like those of a majority of her peers, is one in which the students and teachers work well together and where the teachers are interested in what students have to say and in their well-being. Students in her school are able to obtain extra help when they need it. She spends most of her in-school preparation time assessing student work or looking for teaching resources.

She indicates that she would make the decision to become a teacher again at this point in her career because the advantages of being a teacher outweigh its disadvantages, though nearly a third of her colleagues wonder whether it might have been better to have chosen another career.

Highly satisfied with her performance in the school in which she is currently teaching, she says she enjoys working there and describes the school as a good place to work. Notwithstanding the satisfaction with her performance, she says that she welcomes suggestions about teaching from her colleagues and likes working with them on teaching tasks such as planning and

assessment. On average, about half of her peers agree that the school has a shared culture of responsibility and a collaborative culture based upon mutual support.

She believes that she and her colleagues are valued by the parents of the students attending the school in which she works, but believes that the teaching profession is not valued in the wider society.

While she, like her colleagues, has participated in a number of professional learning activities during the school day, she did not have the benefit of an induction or a mentoring program when she entered the profession. She has been engaged in a variety of self-initiated professional learning activities, including individual research on a topic of professional interest and participation in a professional learning network. The topical focus of her professional learning activities are most frequently devoted to subject-specific knowledge or pedagogy, or student evaluation and assessment. She typically perceives these to have had an impact on her teaching. She would like to be more engaged in professional learning, but time, money, work schedule and the lack of incentives pose some obstacles to her doing so.

### **Findings from the Interviews**

Teachers interviewed about how their workload affects their sense of professionalism explained that most of the time their workload has no effect on their professionalism though, at times they have felt overwhelmed, and have worried that they were not meeting their own professional standards. Teachers admit that, as beginning teachers, they struggled with their perceived inability to meet the highest standard of practice, every day. They say that they eventually developed a sense of their own professional standards, and understand what can be done with the time and resources available. Experienced teachers say that they prioritize the tasks that are most essential at any given time. They admit, however, that even experienced teachers struggle sometimes to maintain a balance between their expectations of themselves and what is possible.

During the interviews teachers expressed a variety of views about their work, workloads and how they managed them. One teacher cited her annual involvement in the school's musical play and said, "While we are rehearsing and producing the play, I try to keep the day-to-day classroom work manageable. But having said that, it is still an enormous amount of work, and while I am involved with the play I am more tired, and have less energy for other teaching tasks."

Another pointed out that sometimes Ministry or board initiatives had an impact on workload that in turn had an impact on her professionalism – "I feel like we're doing too much, too fast (in the professional learning) and that my daily teaching is being shortchanged."



A third teacher said that when teachers don't feel respected, cared for and supported by their peers and the administration, their sense of professionalism is undermined. "It brings out the worst in us – staffroom venting and (unnecessary) disputes among colleagues." She went on to say that she "feels most unprofessional if I find myself venting in the staffroom", because she believes that "an 'exquisite respectfulness' by staff for students is very important."

Principal interviews confirm much of what was learned from interviews with teachers. Principals typically reported that the teachers in their schools were collegial and worked together in teams. Many emphasized the work of the teachers in collaborative planning, teacher professional learning (including collaborative inquiry), and other kinds of shared work. According to them, the factors that affect the way in which teachers work together include organizing teachers into grade or division teams, providing common planning time and/or additional release time for those teams to work together, the availability of professional learning opportunities that have teacher collaboration as a component, and the active inclusion of the "teacher voice" in decision making about professional learning. The provision of time during the school day for co-planning and for professional learning is seen generally by the principals as essential to the success of the professional learning and to the development of on-going collaborative processes for instruction and assessment.

Principals identified a broad variety of strategies that they use to help teachers manage their daily workload and the workload associated with Ministry and board initiatives. Many of these strategies were holistic and involved paying careful attention to the teachers' readiness and providing support tailored to the individual teacher's age and stage of career. A few principals provided a more traditional operational approach, focussed more on the mechanics: use the staff meeting for some professional learning, balance the school calendar, provide professional learning communities and be flexible with due dates.

There was significant concordance among principals, directors of education and school trustees as well. Directors typically focussed on relationships within the board: administration to trustee, administration to principal, administration to teachers' unions or other employee groups, emphasizing the need to actively attend to and foster the relationships with school leaders and teachers' organizations. These relationships were seen as essential to the development of a sense of common purpose for the board, and in communicating the context and reasons for the changes and expectations placed on those working in the system. Almost all directors interviewed said that they were attentive to emerging initiatives as they dealt with their year by year operational plans, the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and the School Improvement Plans.

A clear commitment to supporting active professional learning was part of the working environment for the directors. Some spoke of "professional development for all" – teachers,

custodians, educational assistants, ECEs - as essential to the board's working environment. They identified the contributions that the board administration makes to the professional atmosphere in the district:

- modelling the professional relationships and engagement that they wanted to see, and being seen themselves as risk-takers and life-long professional learners;
- providing the time and resources for teachers to be engaged in collaborative and professional learning work;
- providing leadership programs that were open to teacher and union participation;
- ensuring that schools had within their buildings places that teachers could meet to do collaborative work;
- listening to teachers about what they needed to succeed in their classrooms;
- having an active presence of superintendents/director in the schools, seen to be interested and participating;
- ensuring that the demands of ministry and board initiatives were aligned with the board's strategic plan, board and school improvement plans; and
- providing context and making sense of new initiatives and demands to teachers whose work will be affected.

First and foremost, according to the directors and their designates, the board administration must provide the context for initiatives, and mediate and moderate the demands that the initiatives will place on teachers. As one director put it, "It's important that it doesn't feel like 17 separate things are happening. Our job is to interpret, to alleviate anxiety." Listening to teachers' concerns is an important part of that process. It is the board administration that must demonstrate purpose and alignment, and make the strategic allocation of human and financial resources. Release time for the work of the initiative is an important part of the support provided as well as instructional leadership from board program staff. Underlying these is the respect shown by the administration for teachers and their unions, enabling shared understanding of the task and problem-solving approach to issues that arise.

When speaking of the professional atmosphere within the school board, trustees emphasized collegiality, cooperation and collaboration, and identified key ingredients contributing to them:

- An awareness of roles, and role distinctions (including trustees);
- Good communications and active listening;
- Mutual respect across role lines;
- Good working relationships, especially with the unions;
- The encouragement of innovation;

- A strategic plan that is clear about mission, vision and values, supported by operational and board improvement plans; and
- Paying close attention to student progress.

Trustees saw some Ministry initiatives as creating important cultural shifts in the way the teacher, school and system view their collective work. They observed that the focus now is on a profession that is actively assessing the progress of students (individually and collectively) and adjusting teaching and learning strategies to improve outcomes on a continuing basis.

Trustees described working actively to keep alignment between proposed initiatives and the board's strategic plan and its Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement. Some trustees said that if an initiative proposed by the Ministry does not enhance the direction the board is already committed to, they will drop the initiative. Others indicated that there is a thoughtful triage undertaken about which initiatives to implement. Board members identified the provision of resources (budget for time release, instructional support and teacher learning resources) as a pivotal support to help manage the demands of initiatives. Trustees emphasized the importance of consistent messaging, working with community partners, keeping the big picture in mind, and communicating clearly the priorities of the system as part of the support for managing emerging demands.

## Key Questions

### **How should teacher workload and professionalism be defined?**

The context in which a study is conducted affects the meanings and perceptions of key concepts such as workload and professionalism. This study was conducted in Ontario where the Education Act (R.S.O. 1990, Chapter E.2) defines a teacher as a member of the Ontario College of Teachers. Members of the College of Teachers adhere to the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession:

#### Commitment to Students and Student Learning

Members are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Members facilitate the development of students as contributing citizens of Canadian society.

#### Professional Knowledge

Members strive to be current in their professional knowledge and recognize its relationship to practice. They understand and reflect on student development, learning

theory, pedagogy, curriculum, ethics, educational research and related policies and legislation to inform professional judgment in practice.

#### Professional Practice

Members apply professional knowledge and experience to promote student learning. They use appropriate pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, resources and technology in planning for and responding to the needs of individual students and learning communities. Members refine their professional practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue and reflection.

#### Leadership in Learning Communities

Members promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, safe and supportive learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles in order to facilitate student success. Members maintain and uphold the principles of the ethical standards in these learning communities.

#### Ongoing Professional Learning

Members recognize that a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge (<http://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-of-practice>).

In addition, members of the College adhere to the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*:

#### Care

The ethical standard of *Care* includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice.

#### Respect

Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* are trust and fair-mindedness. Members honour human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment.

#### Trust

The ethical standard of *Trust* embodies fairness, openness and honesty. Members' professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians and the public are based on trust.

#### Integrity

Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in the ethical standard of *Integrity*. Continual reflection assists members in exercising integrity in their professional commitments and responsibilities (<http://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/ethical-standards>).

In this study, teacher workload was defined as the total amount of time a teacher spends teaching, planning lessons, marking student work, collaborating with other teachers, participating in staff meetings and on other tasks related to their job at the school in which they were employed at the time of the survey.

Directions asked teachers a series of questions about the amount of time, during the most recent complete calendar week prior to the survey, spent in total teaching (planning lessons, marking student work, collaborating with other teachers, participating in staff meetings and on other tasks related to their job, including tasks that occurred during weekends, evenings or other out of classroom hours that were related to their employment at the school to which they had been assigned. They were also asked about the total amount of time they spent on in classroom teaching during the most recent complete calendar week and about the number of hours spent on a list of tasks. In addition to their instructional responsibilities, elementary teachers in this study devoted approximately 25 hours on a wide range of tasks associated with their teaching responsibilities. The average elementary teacher responding to this study spends approximately 48 hours per week on teaching and teaching-related tasks.

The survey did not ask teachers to characterize their workloads. It was evident from the interview data that ETFO members do not typically think of workload, unless the demands upon them become overwhelming, prompting them to regard the workload as “too heavy.”

Teacher professionalism was defined by teachers' responses to statements adopted from the 2008 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS):

- Teaching has a shared body of professional knowledge that should be common to all of us.
- I prefer to work alone. My classroom is uniquely mine and I do things my way whenever I can. (reversed scored)
- Having common professional standards in teaching is important.

- I enjoy working collaboratively with my colleagues on school improvement initiatives.
- I enjoy working collaboratively with my colleagues on professional learning.

Teachers were provided with a four point Likert-type scale and asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Teachers earning high scores on the scale were regarded as exhibiting greater professionalism than those earning low scores.

There was very high levels of agreement among ETFO members that teaching had a shared body of professional knowledge that should be common to all teachers (95.4%); that having common professional standards in teaching was important (98%); that they enjoyed working collaboratively with their colleagues on school improvement initiatives (83%), and with their colleagues on professional learning (91.4%). Less than 25% of the respondents said that they prefer to work alone, doing things their own way whenever they can (23.4%). That the teachers who responded to the survey agreed with such statements was not surprising in light of the fact that similar sentiments are expressed in the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, the collective vision of professionalism that guides the daily practices of the members of the Ontario College of Teachers.

**What does the research literature say about effective teaching and learning practices, conditions that support effective teaching and learning, and how these conditions can best be implemented?**

There is a large and growing body of accumulated evidence about factors that have an impact on student achievement. While it is beyond the scope of this study to enumerate all of the relevant factors, many have been summarized in John Hattie's *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement* (2009).<sup>1</sup> Hattie argues that, in education, "almost everything works" (p. 15). To minimize the risk that policies and practices will be adopted that may make only a marginal contribution to student achievement at considerable cost, Hattie advocates that those concerned with improving student achievement look for factors that yield effect sizes in excess of  $d = 0.40$ , "a level where the effects . . . enhance achievement in such a way that we can notice real-world differences" (p. 17), a region that Hattie labels the zone of desired effects. He notes that teachers average an effect of  $d = 0.20$  to  $d = 0.40$  per year on student achievement, cautioning that "not all teachers are effective . . . and not all teachers have powerful effects on students" (p. 108). The table below (adapted

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<sup>1</sup> Hattie, J.A.C. (2009) *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge

from Hattie) provides both the average effect size (d) and its common language effect size indicator (CLE), the probability that the given effect will make a positive difference, or the percentage of students exposed to the factor who will gain in achievement compared to students not exposed to the factor.

	Meta-analyses (N)	Studies (N)	Effects (N)	d	CLE
<b>School Contributions</b>					
School Size	1	21	120	.43	30%
Classroom Management	1	100	5	.52	37%
Classroom cohesion	3	88	841	.53	38%
Peer influences	1	12	122	.53	37%
<b>Curricular Contributions</b>					
<b>Reading</b>					
Visual-perception	6	683	5035	.55	39%
Vocabulary programs	7	301	800	.67	47%
Phonics Instruction	14	425	5968	.60	43%
Repeated reading	2	54	156	.67	47%
Comprehension programs	9	415	2653	.58	41%
Second/Third chance	2	52	1395	.50	35%
Writing Programs	5	262	341	.44	31%
<b>Science and Mathematics</b>					
Mathematics	13	677	2370	.45	32%
Science	13	884	2592	.40	29%
<b>Others</b>					
Social skills programs	8	540	2278	.40	27%
Tactile stimulation programs	1	19	103	.58	41%
Play programs	2	70	70	.50	35%
Creativity programs	12	685	837	.65	47%
Outdoor/adventure programs	3	187	429	.52	37%
<b>Teacher Contributions</b>					
Quality of teaching	5	141	195	.44	31%
Teacher-student relationships	1	229	1450	.72	51%
Professional development	5	537	1884	.62	44%
Expectations	8	674	784	.43	31%
Not labeling students	1	79	79	.61	43%
Teacher Clarity	1	na	na	.75	53%
<b>Teaching Strategies</b>					
<b>Strategies emphasizing learning intentions</b>					
Goals	11	604	820	0.56	40%
Behavioral organizers/advance organizers	11	577	1,933	0.41	29%
Concept mapping	6	287	332	0.57	40%

<b>Strategies emphasizing success criteria</b>					
Mastery learning	9	377	296	0.58	41%
Keller’s PIS	3	263	162	0.53	37%
Worked examples	1	62	151	0.57	40%
<b>Strategies emphasizing feedback</b>					
Feedback	23	1,287	2,050	0.73	52%
Providing formative evaluation	2	30	78	0.90	64%
Questioning	7	211	271	0.46	32%
<b>Strategies emphasizing student perspectives in learning</b>					
Spaced vs. massed practice	2	63	112	0.71	na
Peer tutoring	14	767	1,200	0.55	39%
<b>Strategies emphasizing student meta-cognitive/self-regulated learning</b>					
Meta-cognitive strategies	2	63	143	0.69	49%
Study skills	14	668	2,217	0.59	41%
Self-verbalization/self-questioning	3	113	1,150	0.64	45%
<b>Strategies emphasizing classroom-based teaching</b>					
Reciprocal Teaching	2	38	53	0.74	52%
Direct Instruction	4	304	597	0.59	41%
Problem-solving teaching	6	221	719	0.61	43%
Cooperative learning	10	306	829	0.41	29%
Cooperative vs. competitive learning	7	1,024	933	0.54	99%
Cooperative vs. individualistic learning	4	774	284	0.59	42%

The factors outlined above are discussed in greater detail in literature review section of the main report.

Over the past three decades, education authorities in many western countries have instituted centralized school reforms in a bid to improve student achievement and outcomes (e.g., Day & Gu, 2007). The specific nature of such reforms has differed from country to country, but increased accountability (for teachers, schools, and public school systems), standardization and testing have been consistent elements (Olmos, Van Heertum & Torres, 2011). In many cases, reforms have included government mandated curricula, prescribed instructional practices, and standardized (and sometimes high-stakes) tests. These accountability-based reforms have been widely criticized for their perceived threats to teacher professionalism and for their impact on teacher workloads.

Teacher professionalism is based on expertise, professional judgment and professional autonomy. The defining characteristics of professionalism include: knowledge of the major theories associated with a particular domain; extended specialized training; and a code of ethics that guides behavior (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Working in situations of complexity and uncertainty, professionals draw on their knowledge, training, and experience to make decisions



about their work. The autonomous use of their professional judgment is a key component of professionalism (Freidson, 2001). Teacher professionalism implies that teachers make their own curricular and instructional decisions to meet the particular needs of the students in their classrooms (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Teacher autonomy is not boundless: teachers' decisions must be guided by accepted theory and professional standards, their behaviours must adhere to a professional code of ethics, and they are obligated to serve the best interests of their students.

The literature reviewed for this study indicated that, while centralized school reforms can have a negative impact on teacher professionalism, the deskilling and deprofessionalization widely predicted to be an inevitable outcome of standards based reform have not been widely observed. With regard to their professionalism, teachers are less concerned with the specifics of government policy and much more concerned with the nature of reform implementation as it occurs within their particular contexts. Principals play a critical role in mediating reform processes. When principals foster a culture of shared decision-making and of collegial collaboration among teachers, when teachers feel that they are trusted to use their professional judgment in conducting their daily work, then teachers retain a strong sense of professionalism. Moreover, the principal's role in fostering a strong sense of professional collaboration among teachers is key to managing the workload and professionalism issues that can arise in the context of centralized school reform.

### **How have professional teaching practices evolved in relation to school, district and system improvement initiatives in Ontario over the past decade?**

Over the course of the past ten years, Ontario pursued reforms designed to change school and classroom practices while engaging teachers in a positive way and generating public support for public education in Ontario. To accomplish this, the approach to reform maintained respect for professional knowledge and practice, and emphasized professional capacity-building and strong leadership.

At the elementary level, the reforms were spearheaded by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) established in 2004. A key goal of the LNS was to build capacity and support leadership and instructional effectiveness in Ontario school boards and schools. The LNS worked with school boards to set ambitious achievement targets—reflecting high expectations for every student—and to develop school improvement plans for achieving those targets. The LNS supported boards and school leaders with resources and professional development to implement best practices in literacy and numeracy instruction. Teachers received training on best teaching practices and the use of assessment data to guide instruction. The LNS also worked with schools to raise awareness regarding achievement issues for particular groups of students—including Aboriginal students, second language learners, students with special needs,

and boys—and to implement targeted interventions for those groups. The LNS also worked with schools and boards to plan for continuous improvement while managing the local conditions facing individual schools.

The Ontario reforms included provisions to manage teacher workloads while improving student outcomes. New teachers and support workers were hired to decrease class sizes in the primary grades, and two professional activity days were designated within the school year calendar to make time for the capacity building aspects of the reforms. Nonetheless, many teachers reported that the reforms had led to an increase in their workload.

### **What factors contribute to teacher workload?**

Interviews conducted with ETFO members indicate that workload is more a mental construct than a quantifiable entity. Teachers do not typically think of workload, unless the demands upon them become overwhelming, prompting them to regard the workload as “too heavy.” This does not mean that workload has no external referents. Interviewees identified the following aspects of their work as frustrating or overwhelming: report card preparation, special education reporting, or preparing for a subject in the elementary curriculum (e.g. Art) for which they have had no formal preparation.

In addition to their instructional responsibilities, the average teacher responding to the survey spent 25 hours during the week most proximate to the survey administration on teaching related work, including 7 hours and 42 minutes planning and preparing lessons and nearly four additional hours assessing, correcting, evaluating or marking student work.

The amount of time teachers spend on their work predicts whether they are among those teachers who regard themselves as highly satisfied. For example, for each percentage point increase in class time spent on administrative tasks and on keeping order in the classroom, the probability that a teacher will be among those reporting high satisfaction (one standard deviation above the mean on the Satisfaction Scale) diminishes by 7.4% and 4.44% respectively in comparison with teachers reporting low satisfaction (one standard deviation below the mean on the Satisfaction scale).

The factors most frequently identified by interviewees as affecting a teacher’s workload were planning, marking and assessing, communication with parents and participation in extra-curricular programs. The number of students in a class, the range of their learning needs, and the number of identified special education students in the class, factors often referred to as class size and composition, were also perceived to affect teacher workload.

## What factors help or hinder the impact of workload on individual teachers?

Directions' study identified a number of factors that predict high satisfaction among teachers some of which are very powerful. These factors likely mitigate the impact that workload has on teachers. These factors are: teacher professionalism, school shared decision-making, a positive academic and student orientation, a positive classroom disciplinary climate, feelings of teaching efficacy, and a collaborative teaching environment. The impact of these factors is often substantial. For example, for each point of increase on the Teacher Professionalism Scale, a teacher is 12.8 times more likely to be in the high satisfaction category than the low satisfaction category. A one point increase on the School Shared Decision Making and Academic & Student Orientation scales indicates that, respectively, a teacher is 3.8 times and 3.5 times more likely to be in the high satisfaction group than the low satisfaction group, respectively.

Although very weakly correlated, all but three of these tasks exhibited an inverse relationship with satisfaction, meaning the more time teachers spent on the task, the less satisfied they were. The three exceptions were: team work and dialogue with teachers in this school, engaging in extra-curricular activities, and supervising a student teacher. The latter three activities were directly associated with satisfaction, meaning that the more time teachers spent on them, the higher their satisfaction. Though here, too, the relationships were also very weak.

Factors that mitigate the impact that workload has on teachers include: teacher professionalism, school shared decision-making, a positive academic and student orientation, a positive classroom disciplinary climate, feelings of teaching efficacy, and a collaborative teaching environment. What administrators do affects teachers' perceptions of their work, their satisfaction, their collaboration with others, and their sense of professionalism. Factors identified as having a positive impact were:

- A sense of clear purpose for the school's work, understood and shared by administrators and teachers alike (and sometimes the students);
- The provision of opportunities to work with other teachers – to observe other classrooms, to co-plan and to co-teach, to share information and understanding about assessment and marking in each other's classes;
- Attention to the use of physical space – ensuring that teachers worked in proximity to those with whom they shared programs, and ensuring that there were reasonable workspaces;
- Ensuring that there were opportunities for teachers to work together across divisional lines, or across English/French Immersion lines in dual-track schools;
- An understanding and recognition of what the teacher's daily work is – an appreciation of what is involved and where the stresses are;

- Consulting with and listening to the teachers in determining what the focus of collaboration and professional learning will be;
- Visibility in and around the classrooms of the school, including the observation of teaching and co-teaching;
- Active support for teachers, whether helping to set the tone and the management of discipline issues for the school, or assisting with parent communication and problem-solving;
- An invitational approach, encouraging and supporting teachers to participate, but not insisting that every teacher must pursue the same path to collaboration or professional learning, and
- Showing confidence in and belief in the importance of teachers' professional judgment.

Direct observation by the principal or vice principal had a demonstrable impact upon a teachers' perceptions of a positive academic and student orientation, school shared decision making, and satisfaction. Moreover, receiving feedback affects teachers' perceptions. For example, feedback that emphasizes student performance has a demonstrable positive impact on teachers' perceptions of a collaborative teaching environment, academic and student orientation, school shared decision making, differentiated practice and satisfaction.

According to the principals, the factors that affect the way in which teachers work together include organizing teachers into grade or division teams, providing common planning time and/or additional release time for those teams to work together, the availability of professional learning opportunities that have teacher collaboration as a component, and the active inclusion of the "teacher voice" in decision making about professional learning. Principals see the provision of time during the school day for co-planning and for professional learning as essential to the success of the professional learning and to the development of on-going collaborative processes for instruction and assessment.

Directors of education noted a range of practices that the board administration can contribute to the professional atmosphere in a board that, in turn, helps to mitigate perceptions that teacher work is unmanageable. These include:

- modelling the professional relationships and engagement that they wanted to see, and being seen themselves as risk-takers and life-long professional learners;
- mediating and moderating the new demands and expectations;
- providing the time and resources for teachers to be engaged in collaborative and professional learning work;
- providing leadership programs that were open to teacher and union participation;

- ensuring that schools had within their buildings places that teachers could meet to do collaborative work;
- listening to teachers about what they needed to succeed in their classrooms;
- having an active presence of superintendents/director in the schools, seen to be interested and participating;
- ensuring that the demands of ministry and board initiatives were aligned with the board's strategic plan, board and school improvement plans; and
- providing context and making sense of new initiatives and demands to teachers whose work will be affected.

Interviews with trustees identified key factors that they contribute to a professional focus and atmosphere:

- An awareness of roles, and role distinctions (including trustees);
- Good communications and active listening;
- Mutual respect across role lines;
- Good working relationships, especially with the unions;
- The encouragement of innovation;
- A strategic plan that is clear about mission, vision and values, supported by operational and board improvement plans; and
- Paying close attention to student progress.

### **What individual professional learning might help teachers to manage their workloads?**

Teachers responding to the survey indicated moderate to high levels of need for their own professional learning in learning about new technologies in the workplace and information and communication skills (ICT) for teaching. Nearly half of the respondents indicated moderate or high needs for teaching cross-curricular skills, teaching students with special needs, and student evaluation and assessment practices, knowledge and understanding of their subject field(s), and pedagogical competencies in the subjects they teach. More than 60% of the respondents indicated that time, money, work schedules and the lack of incentives were barriers to their personal professional learning.

### **What changes in ministry or district practices and expectations might help teachers to manage their workloads?**

While many teachers welcome initiatives that involve collaborative planning and teaching, some express the view that there are too many new initiatives and insufficient time to process and reflect on each of them. However when an initiative appears to shift teachers' focus from the work and goals of the classroom, their response is less positive. School boards and the ministry should consider how policy and program changes can be linked to existing policies and

programs where it makes sense to do so, avoiding the unnecessary appearance of difference. It is also prudent to determine when and over what period of time the policy or program change should be implemented, allowing those implementing the change and affected by the implementation to consider how the policy or practice can be accommodated without unnecessary disruption.

Some initiatives can take the educational system beyond the day to day operational business – such initiatives can focus educators’ work on bigger shared goals regarding student achievement, and help build a sense of collective responsibility. The school improvements and student successes achieved in Ontario over the past decade would not have occurred in the absence of such initiatives.

**What are the opportunities and barriers to effective implementation of Ministry and school board initiatives to improve student achievement within the context of teacher workload and professionalism?**

Sustaining a focus on student achievement and well-being is the primary challenge facing Ontario. Each year brings a new generation of students, some of whom will face significant challenges to their success. Thus, despite the significant improvements in student achievement in Ontario, there will be a continuing need for improvement. It is fortunate that, given the evidence from the survey, Ontario has a cadre of highly professional elementary teachers who are disposed to work collaboratively with their peers to enhance student success and well-being. Unless the reasons for change become unclear or seem unrelated to the overall goals Ontario is pursuing, the pace of change becomes too rapid for teachers to successfully incorporate into their repertoires, or teachers are discouraged from using their professional judgement, the successes Ontario has achieved are likely to be sustained.