

Teachers Matter



NZEI · TE RĪU ROA
NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

Workload

How do we Make Workload Manageable?

Primary teachers consistently report concerns with their workload and identify finding ways to manage excessive workload as a priority issue. The core work for teachers is to enhance student learning. Therefore workload discussions need to identify what will help manage teacher workload and support student learning. We need to look at what constitutes teachers' work and identify the parts that have a positive impact on student achievement so that this can be prioritised and supported. This will lead to discussions about other parts of teachers' work that could be managed differently or eliminated. We need to ask the question: 'what is really meaningful for teaching and learning and what isn't?'

Managing workload

Three potential approaches to managing excessive workload are:

- reducing the amount of work,
- getting more people to do the work, or
- finding ways to organise work differently.

Reducing the Amount of Work or Getting More People to Do it.

Frequently, the first suggestion for managing workload is to reduce class size so that teachers simply have to do less of each task such as individual planning, assessment and reporting to parents. Many teachers support the reduction of class size, however it is not as straightforward as it first seems. Smaller classes mean more teachers are needed, which also means more rooms, more space and more resources.

Reducing teacher: pupil ratios is NZEI policy but, in difficult economic times, is necessarily a longer term goal. The Teacher Supply discussion sheet will help to identify reasons for this and also begin discussions about how we can make the goal a reality. Class size reduction remains a goal but we also need to identify other ways of managing workload, especially in the shorter term.

Doing things Differently

It may be easier to start managing workload by looking at ways teachers can work differently. This comes back to the core question about what teachers do that is the most meaningful for teaching and learning. It may mean making decisions about priorities and identifying non-essential tasks.

Planning, assessment and reporting practices are also frequently identified by teachers as considerable factors in creating workload. These are essential aspects of a teacher's professional role. Discussion about how these things could be done differently will be important in addressing workload issues.

The discussion sheet about National Standards will trigger some of these conversations by looking at how the standards should work to support and reflect highly effective teaching.

Research

Recent research into primary teachers work in New Zealand revealed that on average teachers work approximately 50 hours per week. Examining the drivers of teacher workload identified areas for consideration in managing workload.

They included:

- Pace and frequency of change (e.g. curriculum development)
- Workload during peak times (February, June and November)
- Provision of suitably spaced breaks for teachers (note: new legislation relating to breaks will need to be considered by all schools)
- The amount of required paperwork
- Class size
- Frequency and length of meetings
- The provision and timing of professional development
- More teacher aide support
- More clerical support for teachers and principals
- More ICT technician assistance

Current Support for Managing Workload

In recent years there have been a number of changes at a national level that are intended to help with workload management. These include the introduction of Classroom Release Time (CRT) in 2005.

There have also been significant reductions in teacher pupil ratios in year one and Maori immersion. Alongside this, increases to each school's professional leadership time (that can be used to release teachers in leadership positions) have been made.

Paid sabbatical allows teachers an opportunity for refreshment to help combat the effects of workload. Paid study leave positions are also intended to support teachers by allowing them to upgrade qualifications without the added pressure of post-graduate study while teaching.

Conclusion

It is important that teacher workload is managed so that teachers are supported to deliver high quality teaching programmes for all students. Managing workload will require both system support at a national level and local (school-based) initiatives. We will need to develop and implement both long and short term approaches and think creatively about new ways of managing workload.

Staffroom Discussion

Brainstorm the key drivers of workload for teachers.

1. What are the top 5 things that contribute to making teacher workload difficult to manage?
2. What strategies can you identify to help manage the things identified in question 1?
3. What are the challenges to implementing these strategies?
4. Discuss the list of possible areas for change and how some of the ideas could help to manage workload in the short term