

FEA Workload Recommendations

May 2014

Fairfax Education Association
3917 Old Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22030

Executive Summary

Fairfax County Public School teachers are dedicated to positive outcomes for students and want to spend as much of their work time as possible preparing for and conducting effective lessons with students. Teachers have found that increasing demands on their time have detracted from instruction and filled time with administrative tasks, and that this problem has been getting worse. The Fairfax Education Association (FEA) studied the problem using the FCPS Working Conditions Survey data. We convened an employee focus group and conducted a detailed survey of our members from April 15 to May 2, 2014. We found that teachers feel that time should be freed up for self-directed planning and meeting student needs by spending less time on staff meetings, teacher evaluations, CLT's, and professional development.

FEA has specific recommendations for the FCPS Board on how to implement such changes:

- ◆ By the start of the 2014-15 school year, FCPS should limit the number and duration of mandatory meetings of staff held on days when school is in session. Meetings should not exceed two per month and should not total longer than two hours per month. Meetings should not displace teachers' self-directed planning time.
- ◆ FCPS should reconvene the Evaluation Task Force to find ways to reduce the time and documentation required to complete evaluations. Both teachers' and administrators' time should be conserved as much as possible. Changes should be made prior to the 2014-15 evaluation cycle.
- ◆ By the start of the 2014-15 school year, CLT's should become true autonomous peer collaborations. Principals should provide common planning times for teams. Meeting dates, meeting durations, team leadership and agendas should be determined by the CLT's. CLT meetings should not supplant self-directed planning time.
- ◆ By the start of the 2014-15 school year, FCPS should ensure that professional development requirements are individualized to a teacher's needs and preferences. Reduce travel time by hosting school-based and web-based professional development.

Background

The issue of workload for teachers is not a new problem. In 2006, the FEA hosted a Town Hall on Time, inviting the superintendent and members of the school board to hear directly from employees on this critical issue. In each of the subsequent years, FEA has advocated for workload changes in the meet and confer process and served as partners in the Working Conditions Survey. While there have been some small changes, the workload, coupled with the diminishing pay, has stretched employees to the breaking point. FEA believes that there are specific actions that the school board and the administration can take to reduce the overload and inefficiencies that contribute to the stress and frustration of your employees.

While these will surely not be the only solutions, if implemented, they will provide meaningful relief for staff and will improve the outcomes for students.

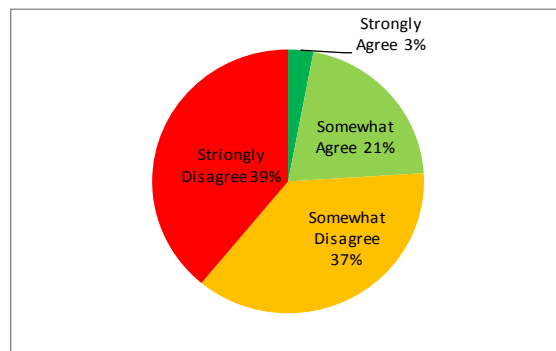
Methodology

FEA conducted an online survey of our members in April in order to provide greater detail about workload problems. Our survey included 40 questions specific to issues that surfaced during our focus group. The survey concluded with the open ended question: “What additional thoughts do you have about your workload, and any steps that might be taken to make it more manageable?” The results of the teacher survey are discussed here. Please note that the use of the word “teacher” throughout this report is meant to denote all members on US 20 or above as well as teacher scale.

Where are we now?

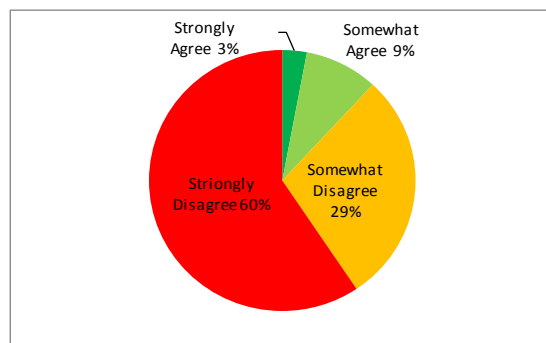
Teachers remain proud to work at FCPS, but we are reaching a tipping point where teachers no longer feel that the amount of work they must do and the hours required to complete the work while maintaining quality at all levels is reasonable.

I feel that my current workload is reasonable.



Workload has not gotten better over the past two years, while salaries have stagnated and real purchasing power has decreased. FCPS continues to ask its teachers to do more with less.

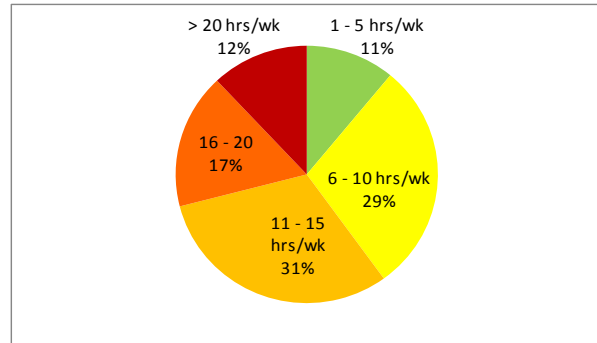
Over the past two years, my workload has become more reasonable.



The central problem

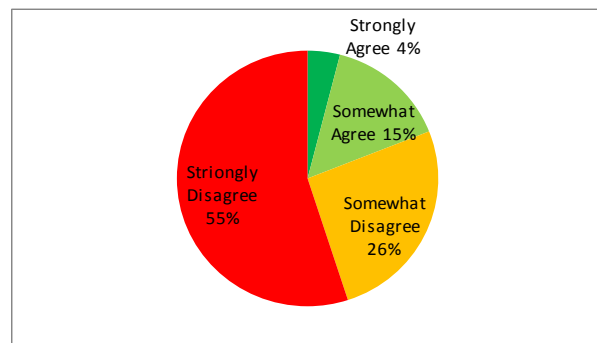
Educators want their work to be at the highest quality and to reflect the best of their abilities. Unfortunately, as of late, that is less and less possible. A plurality of teachers surveyed put in more than 10 hours a week outside of the standard work day to serve our student populations. This cannot continue or the quality of instruction will suffer.

Time worked beyond the 7.5 hour work day.



One of the most uniformly recognized requirements for high quality instruction is having time to properly plan. Over 75% of FCPS teachers surveyed reported that they do not have enough self-directed time to plan for instruction. This must be remedied for FCPS to continue to deliver the best education to our students.

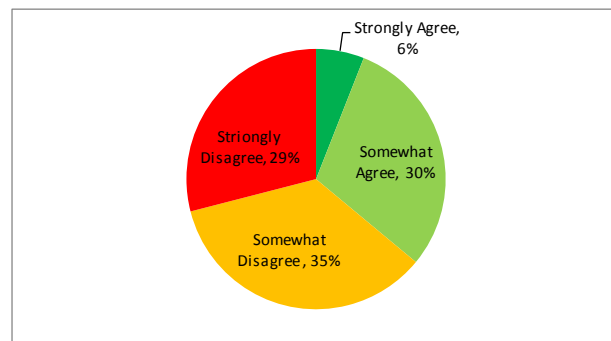
I have enough self-directed planning time during the work week.



Autonomy

Nearly two in three teachers report that they do not have adequate autonomy. When teachers do not have sufficient control over their work, many of the above-described problems become exacerbated. Restoring a higher level of educator autonomy will have a positive impact on many of the areas currently contributing to excessive workload, particularly CLT's and professional development.

I feel that I have adequate autonomy and control over my work.



On meetings:

“Too many meetings and non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. attending IEP meetings, CLT meetings, IB meetings, Extended Essay meetings, Department meetings, 504 plan meetings, Parent Teacher Conferences, Mini-Faculty meetings) that it takes away from quality planning time.”

“I spend more time doing paperwork for cluster offices/the school on how I'm remediating, doing evaluation documentation, doing report cards, meetings for every committee imaginable, etc....I find myself not able to focus on my primary job of planning and teaching.”

Meetings

Our survey asked about time spent in meetings other than CLT's. 72% of teachers spend an hour or more per week in mandatory faculty and department meetings. A full 21% spend three or more hours per week in such meetings.

More than half of teachers report spending more than an hour in other additional (not CLT, faculty or department) meetings per week.

Special Education teachers have additional duties related to IEPs. We asked them how much time they spend outside of their 7 ½ hour contracted work day preparing for and attending IEP meetings. 96% spend more than an hour per week; 60% spend more than three hours/week; 25% spend five or more hours per week.

FCPS needs to take a thorough look at the amount of time that teachers are required to be in meetings. One thing specifically that would help to address the problem would be to make certain that teachers are only required to attend meetings that are relevant to them.

Additionally, limiting the amount of time that a teacher may spend in meetings per week will help to motivate administrators to be sure that meetings are efficient and germane to a teachers' responsibilities.

Clearly, some meetings are required of teachers: parent teacher conferences, back to school night, I.E.P. meetings, and so on. The number, calendaring, and duration of CLT meetings should be left up to the teams. However, other meetings are held at the discretion of principals, such as faculty meetings and department meetings. FEA believes that number of these meetings and the time spent on them should be minimized.

As a professional courtesy to staff, barring an emergency, advance notice of meetings should be given.

FEA RECOMMENDS THAT

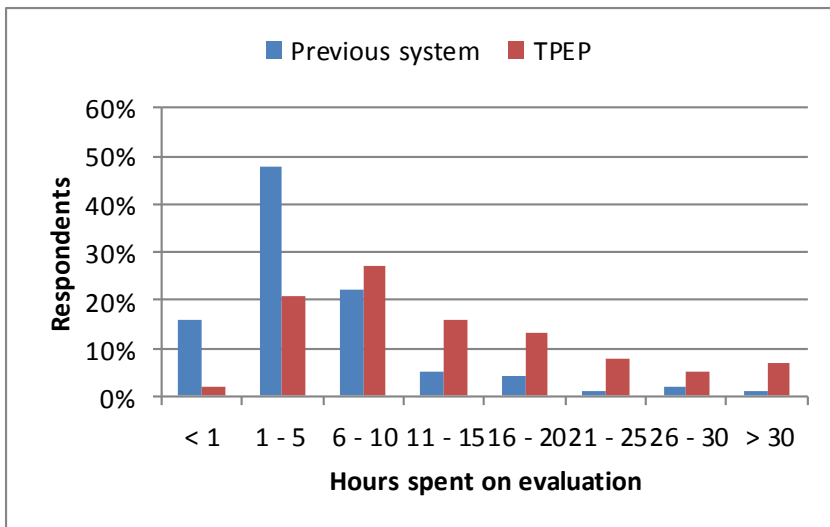
By the start of the 2014-15 school year, FCPS should limit the number and duration of mandatory meetings of staff held on days when school is in session. Meetings should not exceed two per month and should not total longer than two hours per month. Meetings should not displace teachers' self-directed planning time.

Evaluations

The current evaluation system requires a great deal more time than the previous system, burdening both administrators and teachers. Where under the previous evaluation system teachers were evaluated based on observations and documentation that was prepared in the course of their work instructing students, now it requires teachers to assemble portfolios of additional documentation prepared specifically for the Teacher Performance Evaluation Program (TPEP). The preparation of these additional documents is very time consuming.

FEA estimates that the switch to the new system has added, on average, a full day of work to teachers' workload. That average includes teachers on both formative and summative evaluations; the added work for a teacher on summative will be higher.

How much time do you spend each year on evaluation requirements?



On evaluations:

“Hours needed for evaluation/data documentation is incredible.”

“The new evaluation system is cumbersome and time-consuming while adding nothing to the pursuit of excellence in teaching. It is somewhat confusing as well. It was "rolled out" without enough planning and preparation for those implementing it.”

“I would like to see the evaluation system revamped and feel entirely too much time is required on the part of the teacher who is being evaluated. We should not have to spend laborious hours gathering data and evidence for those who are evaluating us.”

FEA RECOMMENDS THAT

FCPS should reconvene the Evaluation Task Force to find ways to reduce the time and documentation required to complete evaluations. Both teachers' and administrators' time should be conserved as much as possible. Changes should be made prior to the 2014-15 evaluation cycle.

On CLT's:

“Our school requires us to have 2 CLT's a week, plus planning meetings. We get one day of our own planning time built into our day, so we end up doing a lot at home.”

“Our school has the CLT leaders set the agendas, but they have to make the agendas based on parameters that admin creates. It doesn't allow the teachers to do what they need to do... Primary teachers need prep time.”

“As a specialist, having and planning for three CLT's a week in a high need school besides a full teaching load is a lot! How can we work better/smarter and not add more time to our current workload? Our two CT's start in the morning before contract hours and one is during our lunch every week. These are not good working conditions.”

“Time spent in CLT's is largely unproductive for special education teachers on certain teams. We struggle to participate in many of the agenda items that are geared toward gen Ed teachers. This time would be better spent having sped CLT meetings or on individual planning time.”

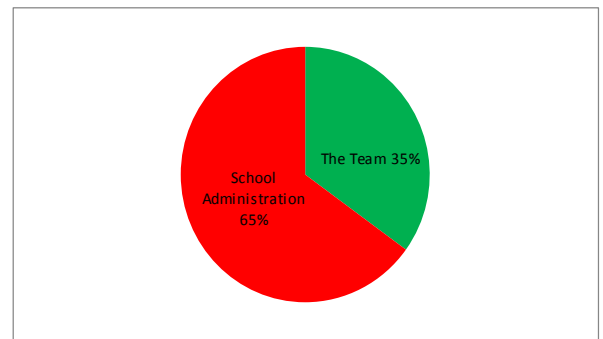
Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT's)

CLT's can be used for collaborative planning, but often come at the expense of self-directed planning time. In FEA's recent survey, 59% of respondents said that they want time in CLT's to decrease.

If teachers had autonomy, time spent in CLT's may have already decreased by consensus.

We asked several questions about how CLT's are run. 65% of respondents said the team leader is chosen by the administration.

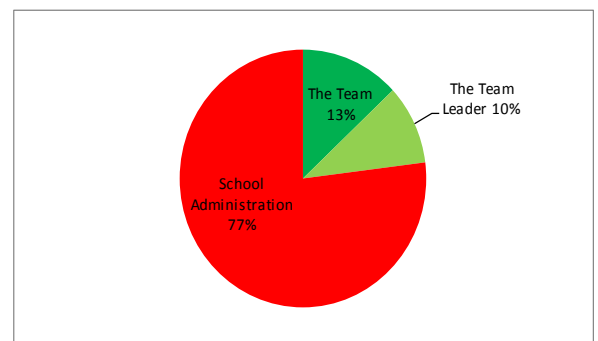
My CLT team leader was chosen by:



35% said that a school administrator attends the CLT usually or always.

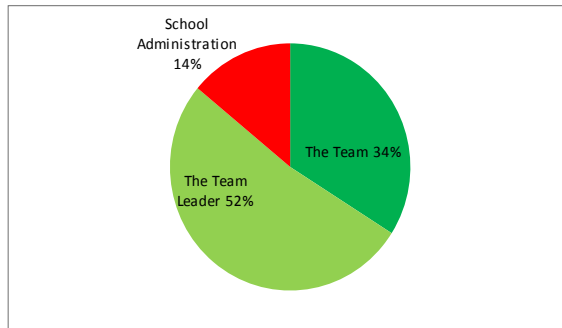
77% report that the frequency of CLT meetings is determined by a school administrator.

The frequency of my CLT meetings is determined by:



While a majority said that agendas are prepared by the team leader, commenters noted that administrators often require team leaders to submit the agendas for their approval. A significant portion of respondents said that school administrators were directly responsible for preparing their teams' agendas.

My CLT meeting agendas are prepared primarily by:



In other words, less than a quarter of CLT's are teacher driven.

Under the top down structure 53% of survey respondents said that they attend two CLT's a week, and 16% of teachers reporting having to attend three or more CLT's per week. It is easy to see that these meetings can quickly overtake a teacher's time if not implemented properly.

If teachers are able to use CLT's as they see fit they are less likely to see them as a burden and more likely to view them as an added value to their planning time. Of those CLT's that work properly, respondents reported that CLT's are a benefit to the workload. CLT's should be a true collaboration among peers.

Richard DuFour and Robert Eakin wrote of principals' proper role in Professional Learning Communities (another name for CLT's) that:

Rather than relying on regulations and procedures to screen every decision or to control others, they rely on shared vision and values to give people the direction they need in order to act **autonomously**. In fact, these principals regard identifying, promoting, and protecting shared vision and values as one of their most important responsibilities. [emphasis added]

FCPS teachers do not feel that they have the autonomy that the literature and models prescribe.

On CLT's:

“Under PLC, we had autonomy to discuss issues that have a direct impact on our teaching. Now, we do what the admin says and we make no choices. It's a complete waste of time. None of it directly impacts the students in a positive way. They took away the ability to make it meaningful in our classrooms. “

“Limit amount of time spent in each CT meeting. Allow CT TEAM to set agendas & leave when business is done. Limit number of required meetings/week. I get 4 hours of planning time, not including Monday afternoons which are almost never available for planning. Of those 4 hours, at least 2 hours are taken up by required meetings.”

FeA RECOMMENDS THAT

By the start of the 2014-15 school year, CLT's should become true autonomous peer collaborations. Principals should provide common planning times for teams. Meeting dates, meeting durations, team leadership and agendas should be determined by the CLT's. CLT meetings should not supplant self-directed planning time.

On professional development:

“Almost all of our planning time is taken for CLT or professional development that is on topics not of our choosing.”

“Because we must leave our school and travel, we are able to accomplish nothing on those Monday afternoons. I have my Master’s degree plus 30, as well as an additional 40-50 hours. I take courses that interest me and improve my teaching, but they should be MY CHOICE, not assigned by the cluster.”

“Professional development and meetings that we are asked to attend need to be an efficient and worthwhile use of our time.”

Professional Development

Teachers learn new techniques and hone their skills through professional development (PD). PD is required by the state for teachers to renew their licenses. Some PD is mandated by FCPS, at the school level, and sometimes in clusters.

We asked “In order for me to be most effective in my work, the amount of time spent in FCPS required professional development should be...?”

5% of respondents said “increased,” 35% said “left the same,” and 59% said “decreased.”

To get an idea of the extent of school-based PD, we asked how much time members spend on school-based PD. 54% reported spending an hour or more per week. Also, 42% said that they were required or “strongly encouraged” to attend PD on weekends or summer days, and a high proportion of those reported that they were not compensated for that time.

There were also several comments about mandatory trainings that did not apply to a particular teacher, either because the teacher had already had the training or due to the inapplicability of the subject to the teacher’s work assignment. It appears that some school-wide PD is mandated for all and is a waste of time for many.

FEA RECOMMENDS THAT

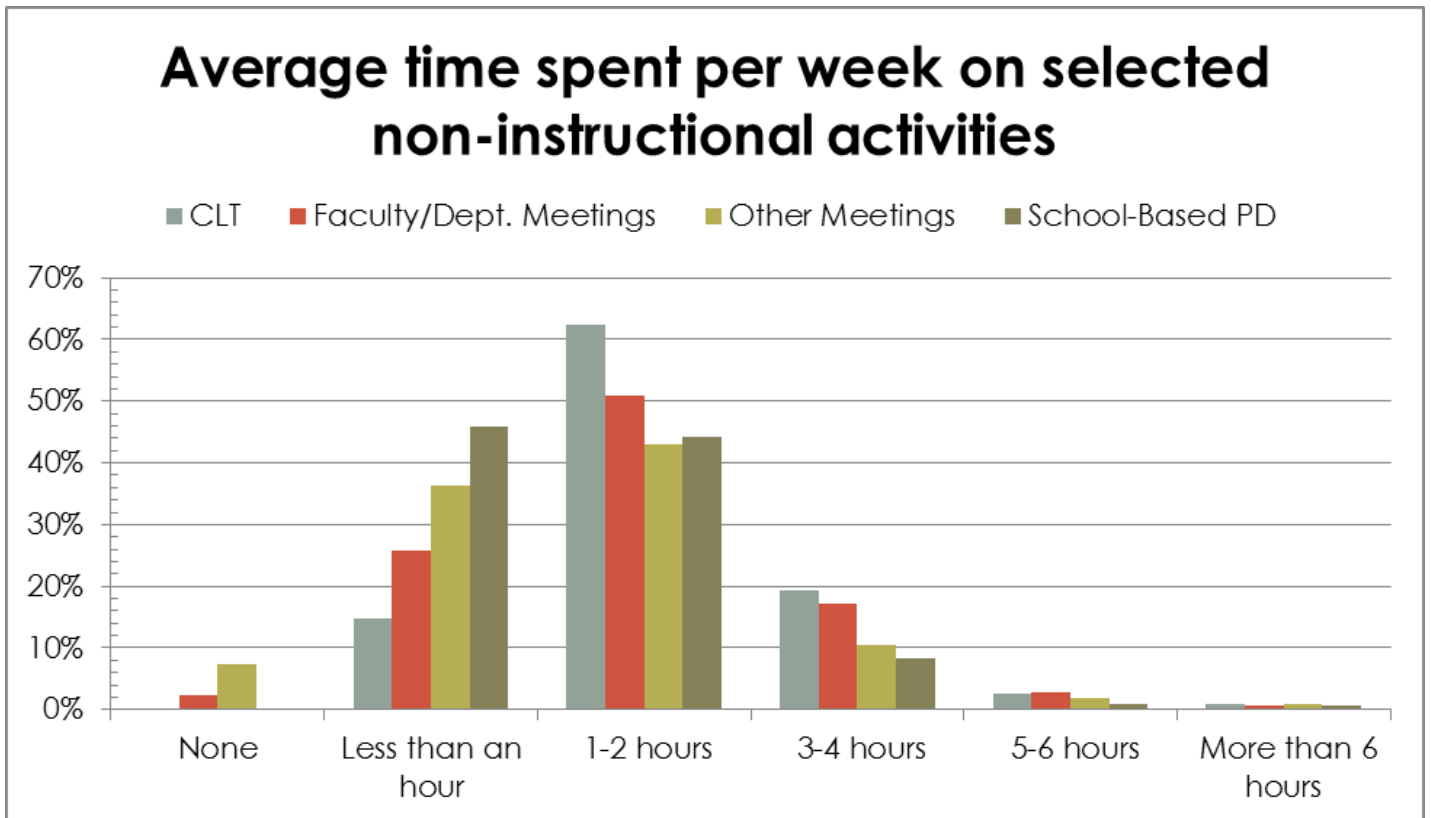
By the start of the 2014-15 school year, FCPS should eliminate blanket professional development requirements. Make sure that PD requirements are individualized to a teacher’s needs and preferences. Reduce travel time by hosting school-based and web-based professional development.

Summary

While each of the aforementioned activities may only take an hour or two each week, when combined they have added up to an untenable amount of additional work for teachers, particularly as they struggle with the effects of the stagnant salaries. FEA cannot support a continuation of the practices of the past, even for a few more months. In short, we cannot ask teachers to wait even longer for more compensation while at the same time ignoring that quality instruction has become more and more difficult in an environment where meetings and paperwork often consume a full day beyond the contract.

FCPS is a place where people are still proud to work, but if we do not fix the problems with workload caused by too frequent meetings, blanket requirements for PD, onerous evaluation documentation, and top down CLT's, then instruction will continue to suffer and teachers will continue on the road toward burnout.

We have provided recommendations throughout this report that will go a long way toward solving the problem. We look forward to working with the school system to implement these changes in the near future.





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