

Executive Summary

This report looks at the work and worklife of office and clerical staff in BC's public school system. It is based on a review of relevant research literature, analysis of recent school budgeting information and an online survey of clerical workers undertaken in the spring of 2014. In the spring of 2014, a total of 1,310 office and clerical staff in 49 school districts completed this survey, a response rate of close to 30 per cent of all such workers employed in BC schools.

Primary findings of the report can be summarized as follows:

- Clerical and office work today takes place in an environment marked by relentless budgetary pressure on school district operations, programs and services. Together with a push to direct maximum resources "to the classroom", this has brought ongoing efforts to squeeze greater economies out of school system administration.
- The result has been a compression of office/clerical hours of work throughout BC's school system and increased workload pressure and stress on those with office/clerical jobs.
- Office/clerical work remains overwhelming female-dominated within the BC system. About 98 per cent of survey participants indicate they are female.
- The average age of an office/clerical worker participating in the survey is 51 years, and that individual has more than 22 years total office/clerical work experience, roughly half of which is with her current employer.
- The largest group of office/clerical workers reports formal qualifications based on a college-level credential. A smaller group reports having university degrees.
- Most clerical work in the public school system is both permanent/continuing and full-time in nature. The average K-12 clerical worker today earns almost \$36,000 annually.
- Office/clerical staff report overall increases in the requirements of their work, in the range and complexity of things demanded of them on the job and in stress associated with these demands.
- Despite these kinds of changes, office/clerical staff report high levels of overall job satisfaction, citing the importance of personal relationships to how they feel about work.
- The survey uncovered a range of health and safety concerns. Many office/clerical staff report pain – concentrated in the neck, back and shoulder areas – and most see this pain as work-related.
- The survey also uncovered a range of ergonomic issues, chief among them the fact that many clerical staff work long hours seated at computer terminals. This

raises significant concerns regarding both ergonomic sustainability and longer-term health.

- Unpaid time is an issue with office/clerical staff. On average, an office/clerical worker performs about half an hour of unpaid work per week.
- Office and clerical staff also report a significant incidence of abusive and aggressive encounters with parents, community members and students. The way they deal with these encounters differs depending on the circumstances. Encounters with students are much more likely to elicit formal reporting, follow-up and consequences as students are generally covered by codes of conduct. Parents and community members are not so clearly covered so there is less likelihood of formal follow-up in cases of abusive or aggressive encounters.

The report indicates a range of areas where workers, their unions and their public school employers need to work together to improve the work environment faced by office and clerical staff.