

Formal Report on recommendations for increasing teacher morale via improved workload management at TNS Beaconhouse.

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ABSTRACT

TNS Beaconhouse is a pre-eminent private school located in Lahore, Pakistan. The complex and innovative ways of teaching at TNS places very high demands on teachers. Excessive and unbalanced workloads among teachers is leading to high work stress which is contributing to the problem of high teacher attrition rates at TNS. Effective and responsive workload management is needed to address this problem.

Primary data was collected through anonymous surveys of teachers and off-the-record interviews with school administrators at TNS. 85% of teachers reported being challenged by their workload. Teachers reported taking up to 18-20 hours of work home. There was a large difference in total number of students taught between teachers highlighting the issue of non-uniform work distribution. The survey also revealed a large number of sources of “hidden workload” which is likely contributing to some teachers having very high workloads.

Recommendations made to manage workload and improve teacher morale include:

1. Using objective measures to calculate actual teacher workload that accounts for “hidden workload”.
2. Identifying overburdened teachers and managing their overwork by extending special considerations, such as:
 - a. reducing paperwork requirements,
 - b. providing office work support to reduce paper runs,
 - c. access to early leave once their classes are done for the day,
 - d. scheduling their subject exams earlier to allow more time for grading,
 - e. decreasing substitution, invigilation and staff duties.
3. Making academic administrators accountable for minimizing the problem of unbalanced workload or overwork in their teacher roster.
4. Providing IT and counselling support to teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Teacher overwork at TNS Beaconhouse:

TNS Beaconhouse is a pre-eminent private school located in Lahore, Pakistan that offers schooling in the International Baccalaureate program starting from Early-Years (EYP) through Primary-Years (PYP), Middle-Years (MYP) and leading up to the Diploma Programme (DP). In trying to offer the best possible education, the school supplements the high standards of the International Baccalaureate Program by implementing the philosophies of Project-Based Learning and the acclaimed Reggio Emilia Approach which is based on the principle of “Learning By Doing”. Based on metrics of student achievement, TNS ranks amongst the top 3% of all IB World Schools. However, teachers at TNS complain about being overburdened with work which is adversely affecting teacher morale and, thereby, student outcomes. This goes against the ‘raison d’etre’ of the school which is to be a model school that offers the best possible education to its students.

B. Effect of teacher workload on teacher performance

Teachers today are being asked to do more while budgetary pressures mean that they have fewer resources available to them. Teachers who are over-burdened report increased stress and decreased performance. The increased stress leads to health issues, absenteeism, emotional exhaustion, plummeting performance and job satisfaction (Huyghebaert). This forces many high-quality teachers to quit after a few years and forces others into an early retirement. The high turnover of teachers is a well-known problem around the world and is especially notable at TNS. High teacher-turnover leads to disruption to students and also other teachers who have to take on

additional work responsibilities while a replacement teacher is hired. With workloads increasing, teachers are left to wonder where they will get the time to fulfill all of their responsibilities. As a result, they have to take an increasing amount of work home, and ultimately settle for “doing less” whereby they are forced into cutting corners and ‘tuning out’ and thus are unable to do their jobs to their own satisfaction. As teaching is becoming increasingly complex and new teaching philosophies require more from teachers to incorporate inquiry-based learning and a plethora of ‘approaches of teaching and learning’ (ATLs), teachers that don’t have adequate time to plan lessons are unable to meet these challenges.

C. Effect of teacher workload on student performance

According to the American Federation of teachers “Teaching quality is the most important school factor in improving student achievement” (American Federation of Teachers 54). As teacher workloads increase, teachers have less time. That means there is less time for: lesson preparation, providing student feedback, holding office hours, availing professional development or reporting student progress to parents. There is a general erosion of the ability to provide good service due to the cognitive and emotional deterioration caused by a persistent work overload. It is therefore of little surprise that study after study has shown an inverse relationship between teacher workload and student performance levels (The Effect of Teachers’ Workload on Students’ Academic Performance in Community Secondary Schools: A Study of Mbeya City). Furthermore, teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement (Fong-Yee). The higher the certification the teacher has, the more likely they are able to find alternative employment. Therefore, increasing workload disproportionately causes attrition of the highest qualified teachers.

D. Problems of intensifying teacher workload at TNS

TNS Beaconhouse is an IB-recognized world school which means the school “has adopted and successfully demonstrated a commitment towards meeting all the standards, practices, and requirements in developing each programme as stipulated by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO)” (Goodrell-Admin). The standards and practices of the IB system place very high demands on teachers to implement innovative and complex ways of teaching for e.g. by implementing the “Approaches to Teaching” and “Approached to Learning” methodologies into their everyday lesson plans. The school offers inclusive education which means that teachers face the additional challenge to meet the varied and diverse requirements of special needs students in the classroom. There is also a high degree of technology integration and implementation throughout the school with teachers expected to use smart boards, AV equipment, use online books by Kognity for instruction, use online examination software called AssessPrep and manage everything through an online planning, assessment and reporting platform called Managebac. The shift to a hybrid mode of teaching during the Covid19 pandemic has meant that teachers teach in-person classes while at the same time streaming their classes through Zoom or Google Meet to the at-home audience. Teachers are expected to respond expeditiously to student and parent concerns over email and respond to requests for virtual parent-teacher meeting at short notice. The creation of Whatsapp groups for staff matters and teacher-student groups for class coordination creates additional pressure that has blurred the line between work and off-work hours. The morale problem due to intensifying teacher workload has been exacerbated by a 10% pay cut that was imposed due to the Covid19 pandemic which came on the heels of little or no increments in pay over the previous few years.

As a result, teachers who were already overburdened are being squeezed to do more for less.

D. Purpose of this report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Gauge the prevalence of work overload amongst teachers at TNS.
- Account for the ‘hidden’ workload of teachers.
- Determine the need to create an objective measure for calculating real teacher workload.
- Explore ways to increase teacher morale through effective workload management and increasing access to key support services.

E. Brief description of data sources

Primary data sources included interviews with existing and past employees of TNS. The interviews were carried out over Zoom. The survey were created using Google Forms and were designed to be filled out anonymously. If the interviewee does not want to be identified, then the interview can be “off the record”. Secondary sources included various authoritative publications including articles from peer-reviewed journals, published dissertations, and publications of major school boards.

F. Scope of this inquiry

The scope of this report is to find ways to increase teacher morale at TNS in ways that require minimal or no additional budgetary allocations. These methods aim to be sustainable at a time of shrinking budgets due to Covid19. The following are areas of inquiry:

1. What are the different factors that can create ‘hidden’ or ‘unaccounted for’ workload for teachers?

2. Is it possible to create an objective measure of the actual workload for a teacher?
3. Is the work fairly distributed across teachers?
4. Is there need for a system where a teacher can raise concerns about their workload?
5. How can the burden of administrative tasks or staff duties be minimized on teachers with excessive workload?
6. What IT support do teachers require?
7. How can teachers best benefit from counselling services?

II. DATA SECTION

A. Accounting for teacher workload at TNS

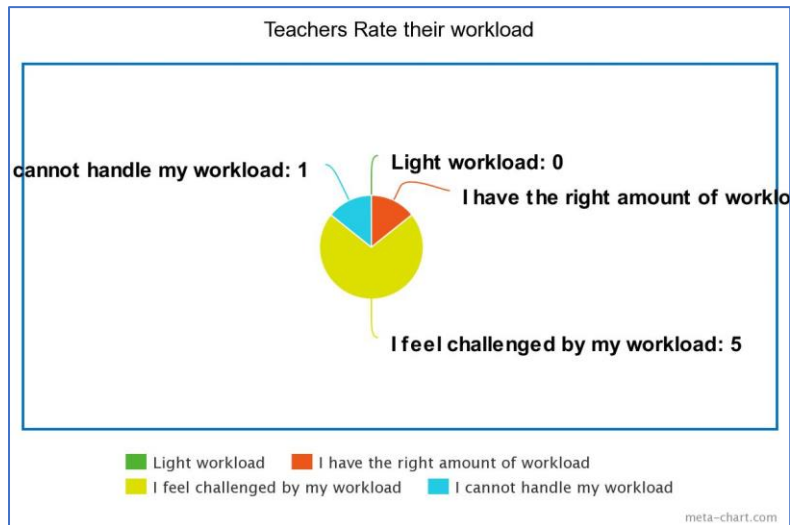


FIGURE 1. TEACHERS RATE THEIR WORKLOAD.

Seven teachers responded to the teacher survey (see Appendix for survey questions). As seen in Figure 1., five out of seven (71%) felt that they were challenged by their workload. One of the seven said that were not able to cope with their workload, whereas, only one felt they had the right amount of workload. This provides strong evidence that teachers at TNS believe their workload is excessive.

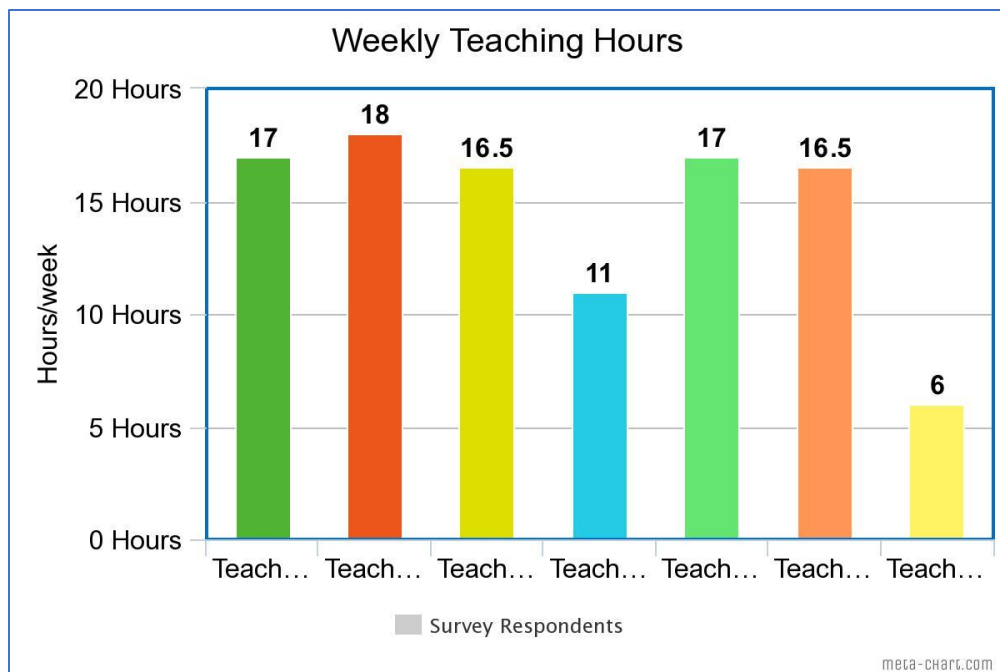


FIGURE 2. WEEKLY TEACHING HOURS OF TEACHERS.

Figure 2 displays the weekly classroom teaching hours for the teachers. Most teachers seem to teach between 17-18 hours. No teacher exceeded 18 weekly teaching hours. This is in keeping with school policies. Large differences in the teaching hours of different teachers can be seen. It is unclear if these differences are because of part-time versus full-time employment status as this data as not collected in the survey.

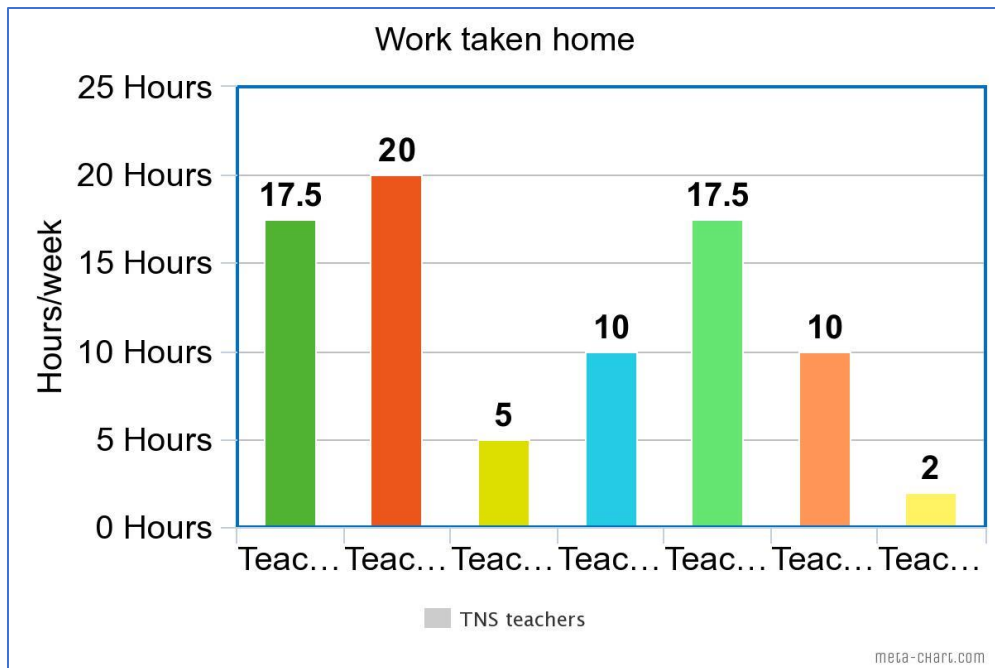


FIGURE 3. WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK TAKEN HOME.

Figure 3 shows the amount of time spent completing work at home. This typically is work that the teacher does not have time or opportunity to complete within school timings. For some teachers, the figures are as high as 18-20 hours which is equivalent to almost 2 extra work days. On average, teachers seem to be taking 12 hours of work home. These figures give us an indication of the magnitude of overwork on teachers and how this might be impacting their stress levels, personal lives and health.

B. Accounting for the “hidden workload”.

Table 1 below provides a listing of what makes up the “hidden” workload for teachers. These are work responsibilities that do not go into any calculation when work is being assigned to a teacher. As a result, teachers who are seemingly teaching the same number of hours on a spreadsheet can end up with widely varying workload. Table 1 was compiled from responses to

Question 7 on the teacher survey, the author’s own experiences as a TNS teacher and some of the secondary sources that have been cited.

A teacher’s ‘hidden’ workload		
Typically <u>accounted</u>.	Typically <u>not accounted</u>: Systematic sources.	Typically <u>not accounted</u>: Non-systematic sources.
Teaching hours in classroom	Large class sizes/Large number of students taught.	Simultaneous online + in-person teaching (hybrid classes)
Substitutions	Complexity of subject matter taught/Complexity of assessment models.	Student mentoring
Staff duties (cafeteria, playground, hall duty etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching multiple subjects Teaching multiple class levels 	Returning parent phone calls
Invigilation duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out-of-field teaching Learning new curricula 	Parent-Teacher Meetings
	Extended Essay supervision + grading	Participation in student-staff committee meetings.
	Internal Assessment supervision + grading	CAS activity advising
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesson planning Laboratory preparation 	Writing letters of recommendation for university admissions.
	Unique grading and feedback requirements	Making tests and exams.
	Homeroom teacher housekeeping responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance checks, Creating softboard displays, parent notifications. Distributing circulars/fee challans etc Parent circulars 	Holding student vivas
	Workshops	Concerts/Sports Day/Event duties
	Professional development/training	Field trips
	Personal Project supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive classrooms Number of students requiring individualized education plans or special needs support.
		Students/Classes with disciplinary problems

TABLE 1. TASKS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A TEACHER’S WORKLOAD. THE TASKS ARE CLASSIFIED BASED ON WHETHER THEY ARE TYPICALLY “ACCOUNTED FOR” OR NOT BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION WHEN WORKLOAD IS ASSIGNED.

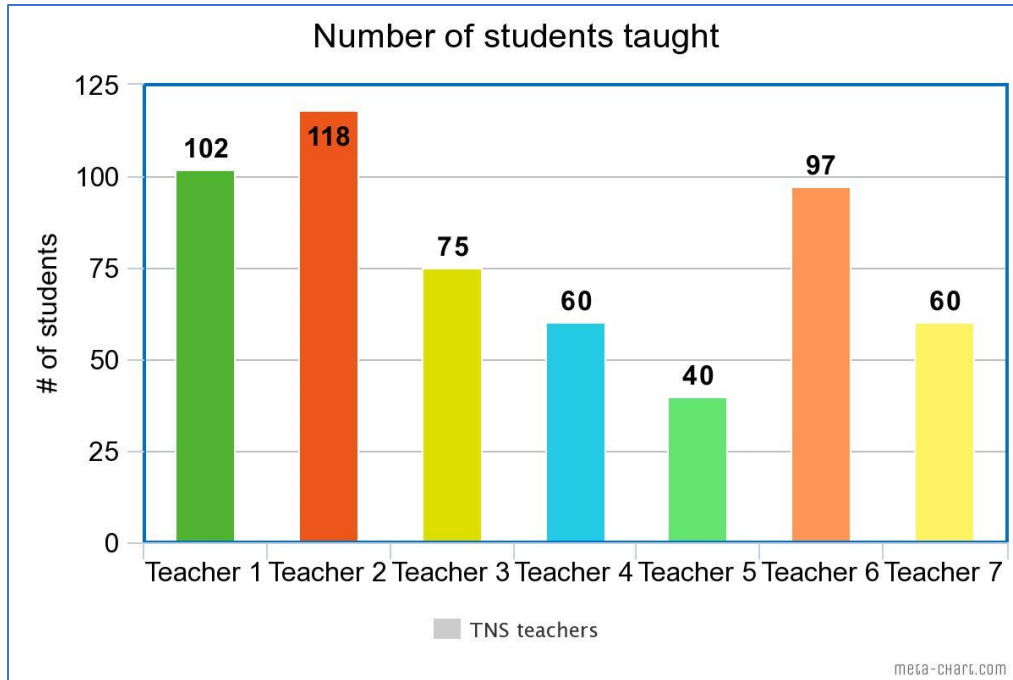


Figure 4. Number of students taught by each teacher.

Figure 4 shows the survey responses to total number of students taught by a teacher. The amount of workload for a teacher is closely tied to class size as the amount of grading and feedback scales linearly with number of students. In the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme where there is a mandatory research project in each subject which the teacher supervises, the total work for teachers scales exponentially as the teacher takes on the supervisory role for each additional student in addition to the usual grading of tests and exams. Therefore, class size must be taken into account into any formula that seeks to assess teacher workload.

C. Need for an objective measure for assessing and assigning teacher workload

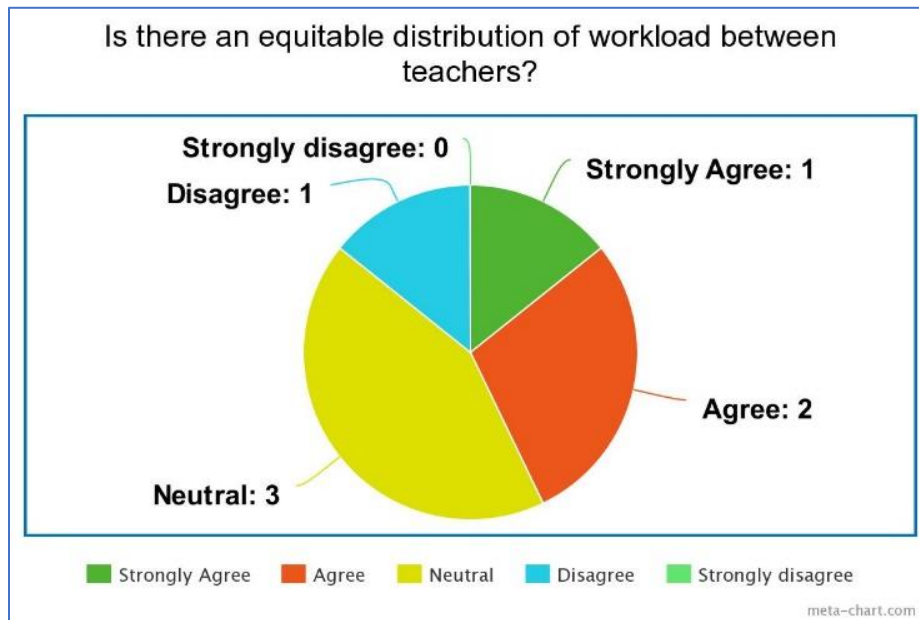


Figure 5. Teachers self-assess their workload.

There is no formula or systematic method currently in use for assigning work to teachers, besides a policy that caps teacher classroom hours at 18 per week. As a result, there are large differences in the workload of different teachers. This risks over-straining some teachers and adversely affecting their morale. Figure 5. shows that 3 out of 7 teachers agree that work distribution is inequitable.

Furthermore, in the written responses to the survey question 9, teachers indicated that although the administration was open to listening about concerns about workload, everyone is mildly cautious about taking this matter up with them. The precise reasons for this are unclear, however, the expectation of teachers to work hard and be model employees undoubtedly figured into it as well as concerns about job security as the teachers are not unionized. With the stigma and hesitation for teachers to raise their concerns, it would be ideal if the administration takes proactive steps to address the issue on their end.

D. IT resources and counselling for teachers

Nearly all teachers were of the opinion that the school needs to improve its IT infrastructure and tech support services and a majority indicated an interest in availing counselling services.

Notably, the teachers that reported feeling more stressed and overworked, also expressed interest in availing both these services.

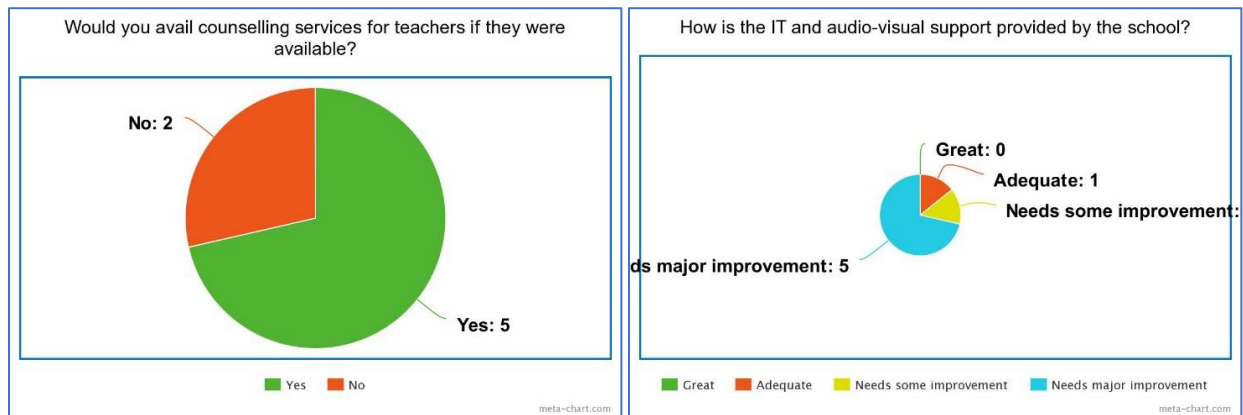


Figure 6 and 7. Teacher views on IT and counselling support.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Interpretation of findings

“Critics of educators often say teaching is not rocket science and they are correct – good teaching is much more complex!” – David Dibbon (Dibbon)

The teacher survey has made clear, that teachers at TNS have an above average workload. 71% of teachers report being challenged by their workload with 1 in 7 indicating they are unable to cope with their workload. Teachers reported needing to work an average of 12 hours/week at home to meet their work obligations. More importantly, some teachers are disproportionately more affected and reported working as much as 20 hours at home. Some of the discrepancy between the workload of different teachers comes from a large component of “hidden” work that is not accounted for when work and duties are assigned. These factors include failing to account for class sizes, supervision of student projects and research projects, number of different subjects/grade levels taught by the same teacher etc. In interviews with the administrators, they acknowledged that the school has no systematic way of calculating workload other than the policy of a maximum of 18 weekly teaching hours. They were open to the idea of a more flexible and inclusive method of calculating workload, however expressed some caution regarding how that may impinge on their flexibility of assigning work.

B. Proposed solutions

It is widely accepted that happy teachers make for happy classrooms and elevate student learning outcomes. Happy and motivated teachers teach better and have more time and energy to cater to the collective and individual needs of their students (McLean, Leigh et al.). Teachers that are well rested contribute to students reporting more academic motivation and in-class satisfaction

(Poon, Cyanea Yui-Sum et al.). Improving teacher morale at TNS will directly lead to improved learning outcomes for students and decreasing the high rates of teacher turnover that is a source of disruption to classroom learning. I propose the following solutions:

B1. Calculating teacher workload: The use of a quantitative measure of teacher workload should be introduced. Such formulae have been proposed in existing literature (Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology; Liang et al. 72; Affleck) but will need to be customized to the needs of TNS teachers and administrators keeping in view the sources of “hidden workload” listed in Table 1.

B2. Managing teacher overwork: There is a need to rectify inequitable workload distribution. Teachers who are overworked may be accommodated by providing them direct support and incentives to mitigate their workload and stress. Such considerations can include:

- a. reducing their paperwork requirements,
- b. providing office work support to reduce paper runs,
- c. easier access to early leave when classes are done.
- d. Scheduling their subject exams earlier to give them more time to grade.
- e. Decreasing substitution, invigilation and staff duties
- f. Additional ways to reduce the workload of these teachers can be devised using the “sources of teacher workload” in Table 1.

B3. Accountability of administrators: Administrators should be made accountable for creating and administering policies that reduce the problem of teacher overload. In the teacher survey, most respondents reported hesitation about taking their concerns about excessive or unbalanced workloads to the administration. This hesitation can be decreased if there is a formalized mechanism for teacher input about their workload. Teachers should be surveyed at

the start of the academic year and mid-way through the year. If there is a discrepancy between assessed workload and self-reported workload, the issue should be flagged and investigated. Issues of overwork can be resolved using the steps for “managing teacher overwork” described above. This will ensure that overworked teachers are not “falling through the cracks” of the system. It will also create a sense of transparency and fairness that teachers reported feeling in the survey.

B4. IT and counselling support: The switch to remote-learning and hybrid models of instruction have required teachers to quickly adopt technology-intensive methods of teaching. A significant source of frustration for teachers are internet bandwidth and dropout issues at school. Addressing the IT infrastructure issues and IT support issues at this time is key to increasing efficiencies and reducing stress levels across the board for all teachers as well as directly contributing to the classroom experience of students.

Given the broad interest by teachers in availing counselling services, the existing student counselling office can be asked to extend stress and coping services to teachers especially those flagged with extraordinary workloads. Along with managing teacher workloads, providing teachers the acknowledgement and support they need to weather through particularly tough times due to excessive workload will undoubtedly help schools retain well-qualified teachers who would otherwise be lost to teacher attrition.

Implementing these recommendations require little to no additional budgetary allocation but can have a large impact on reducing work overload and improving morale for teachers at TNS.

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IV. APPENDICES

Teacher Survey URL: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1eYuG-SA5AXjgIjci0ozH2Vnc4JJfvrtTjIPv_yn-a08/viewform?edit_requested=true#response=ACYDBNgwZ-HDkynwbKHblUe5vpeUhe91wqgil3OS9yCTwq4iGHSQdtHSKcVJvORvOCp7kYk

Interview questions for school administrators:

1. What is the current mechanism to assess teacher workload?
2. What determines how much work is assigned to a particular teacher?
3. Is there any formal mechanism for a teacher to provide feedback about their workload?
4. How important is teacher morale for the school to be successful?
5. Would you be interested in using an objective measure to calculate teacher workload?
6. What would be the advantages of using such a measure to allocate workload to teachers?
7. What would be the disadvantages of using such a measure to allocate workload to teachers?