



Unpaid Work of Education  
Assistants in New Westminster  
School District

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## Table of Contents

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What is your formal job title? .....	4
Is most or all of your assigned work directed to one student? .....	5
Where do you work? .....	5
How many total EA hours a week (regular & temporary) are you assigned? .....	5
Do you put in extra time, over and above your regular & temporary assigned hours? ....	7
If yes, how many extra hours per week do you work beyond your assignment (regular & temporary hours)? .....	7
If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, on how many days per week do you work outside your assignment (regular & temporary hours)? .....	8
If you work more hours than your assignment, when is it? (Fill in as many items as apply) .....	9
When is unpaid work performed? .....	9
If you work more hours than your assignment, is it to, (Fill in as many items as apply)	10
Why do you work more hours per week than you are assigned? .....	11
Would you prefer more paid hours of work in your assignment? .....	13
If the answer to the previous question is yes, what would you want more time for: (Fill in as many items as apply) .....	13
Do you put all the hours worked, both assigned and unassigned, on your time sheet or just assigned hours? .....	14
Does your principal know that you work more hours than you are assigned? .....	15
If the answer to the previous question is 'yes', how do you know that the principal knows? .....	15
Is there an arrangement with the principal to bank your hours worked that are beyond your assigned hours? .....	16
If the answer is yes, when does the principal ask you to take the banked hours? .....	16
If there is an arrangement, is it, .....	16
Do you have a second job outside the school district? .....	17
If yes, what are the main reasons you have another job? (Fill in as many items as apply) .....	17
Approximately how many hours a week on average do you work at your other job? ....	18
Appendix: The Survey Instrument .....	23

## **Introduction**

This past spring, CUPE Local 409 – representing over 240 support staff in School District 40 New Westminister – undertook a survey of members working as Education Assistants (EAs). The survey was intended to compile information regarding the work situation and workload of EAs within the District. A particular focus was the examination of ‘unpaid work’ – the routine logging of unassigned and unpaid hours on the job by EAs working in the District.

This report analyzes the 92 survey responses received back from EAs working in District 40. This level of response reflects a high survey completion rate.<sup>1</sup>

Or the purposes of this report, unpaid or undocumented work is labelled ‘unassigned time.’ This is to underline the fact that it is work falling outside the formal assignment of paid employment with the District yet, for various reasons, is still being performed voluntarily by staff working with special education students in the District.

## **Background**

BC currently employs over 8,000 full-time equivalent educational assistants with a large majority working in the special education field. As with other districts, New Westminister has seen rising demand for this category of school system employee. Different factors are associated with this trend. First there are more and more students with special needs entering BC’s public school system, including more students with multiple disabilities. Second, advances in public and professional understanding of student special needs have brought increased rates of student identification within our public schools. Third is the fact that high profile court cases have seen parents and others pursue civil litigation if efforts to gain official public school recognition and support for particular physical, medical or behavioural conditions and these cases have typically had the effect of seeing school districts increase levels of special needs staffing.

Rising demand for special education services comes at a time not only of provincial enrolment decline but also continued budgetary limitations. While many districts have increased the number of EAs they employ, they have often done this in tandem with intensified control over the hours EAs are able to work. In this way, boards of education have contained costs by stretching EA staff

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<sup>1</sup> In its 2006/07 preliminary budget, adopted May 16<sup>th</sup> of last year, District 40 projected a total of 95.2 FTE educational assistants that it expected to have on staff with 87.5 of this number anticipated in Program 1.10 Special Education (SD 40 New Westminister, *Preliminary Budget for 2006/07*, Schedule A4.) District demographic profile information for support staff forwarded to the Support Staff Education and Adjustment Committee in the spring of 2007 shows about 160 assistant positions (headcount) within the District. The latter figure does include child care, outreach and some other smaller employee categories.

resources to cover the maximum range of demands for special education services. These efforts have led to an increasing alignment of assigned work hours with student contact time with the result that more education assistants work “bell to bell” in their jobs. This trend has brought a growing reality of part-time employment for this job classification within the public school system.

### **The New Westminster survey**

New Westminster EAs responding to the survey were asked to identify which area they worked in. The following graph gives a breakdown of survey responses in this area

#### **What is your formal job title?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Instructional	47	51.1%
Behavioural	30	32.6%
Medical	5	5.4%
Null responses	10	10.9%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

Despite the differences in orientation, the different EA job descriptions in the District reflect the presence of what can be characterized as “core duties.” These duties centre on:

- working directly with students providing support in their classes,
- supervising students in the school and in the community,
- preparing teaching aids and materials,
- providing physical or personal care assistance to students, where required,
- working under the supervision of teaching staff.

These kinds of duties presuppose a system of work scheduling that makes it possible for EAs to have the time to properly discharge the work functions and responsibilities the duties entail.

In certain instances, an Education Assistant is assigned to a single student while in others she will have responsibility for more than one student. In all cases, the primary determinant of an EA’s assignment is the specific array of special education needs an EA’s job is meant to address. The following chart provides a numeric breakdown of job assignments in this area for those participating in the survey.

## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

### Is most or all of your assigned work directed to one student?

Response	Number	% of Total
Yes	44	47.8%
No	44	47.8%
Null responses	4	4.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

As can be seen, equal proportions of EAs in the District report working with one student as opposed to many students.

Most survey respondents also reported working in elementary schools. The following chart shows over 70 per cent of respondents' jobs at this level with most of the remainder employed at the secondary level.

### Where do you work?

School	Number	% of Total
Elementary	67	72.8%
High School	22	23.9%
Null responses	3	3.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

Most of the remaining survey questions explore areas related to EA workload. Survey respondents were asked how many assigned hours they normally worked each week. The following chart shows the breakdown of responses, by school level.

### How many total EA hours a week (regular & temporary) are you assigned?

Response	Elementary	% of Total Elementary	Secondary	% of Total Secondary
Less than 20 hours	6	9.0%	0	0.0%
20 to 25 hours	4	6.0%	0	0.0%
Over 25 and up to 28 hours	42	62.7%	0	0.0%
Over 28 and up to 30 hours	8	11.9%	13	59.1%
Over 30 hours	2	3.0%	7	31.8%
Null responses	5	7.5%	2	9.1%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>67</b>		<b>22</b>	

As is evident, part-time employment is the norm for EAs working in District 40. Close to two-thirds of elementary level EAs report working between 25 and 28 hours per week. The largest reported time allocation for all EAs at the elementary level was 27.5 hours which applied to 41 staff. A comparatively small group of elementary-level EAs – representing almost 15 per cent of those completing the survey – report working more than 28 hours in an average week. In overall terms, average weekly elementary EA hours calculate out to 25.6.

At the secondary level, more average weekly hours are clearly the norm. Unlike the elementary level, no secondary EAs reported average hours under 28 per week. A total of 13 fell between 28 and 30 hours (with the entire number in this band were situated at the 30 hour mark.) Close to a third of secondary EAs had more than 30 hours with the highest number reported at 39 hours. Average secondary EA hours came to 31.0, a figure 21 per cent higher than that calculated for the elementary level.

Average workweeks did not vary substantially by EA job orientation (Instructional – Behavioural – Medical). For the ‘Instructional’ category, the reported average came to 26.5 hours while for the ‘Behavioural’ category the average came to 27.8 hours. ‘Medical’ education assistants reported an average work week of 26.8 hours. Clearly, the reality of part-time assigned work is one that stretches across these differences in job orientation.

For all survey respondents who reported actual work hours, the average workweek came to 27.0 hours. This latter figure reflects the high proportion of survey respondents employed within the elementary system where lower weekly hours are clearly the norm.

These calculations suggest the primary determinant of EA hours in District 40 is not so much the specific job that an EA performs, but rather the level of the school (elementary vs. secondary) where an EA actually works.

### **Unassigned time**

Education assistants were asked in the survey whether they logged additional work time above and beyond assigned hours. More than eight in ten responses indicated that assistants did indeed contribute additional hours to their jobs. Interestingly, despite the differences in average assigned work time for elementary and secondary EAs, the latter had a higher propensity to log additional unpaid hours. Indeed, at the secondary level, there were no EAs who reported not working additional hours. The following graph gives further details of these breakdowns.

## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

### Do you put in extra time, over and above your regular & temporary assigned hours?

Response	Number	% of Total	% of Elementary	% of Secondary
Yes	74	81.5%	77.6%	91.7%
No	13	14.1%	19.4%	0.0%
Null responses	4	4.3%	3.0%	8.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>			

As indicated, while elementary-level EAs work on average more than five hours less than their secondary-level counterparts, secondary-level EAs are more likely to log additional unassigned time on the job. That being said, more than four in five of all EAs within District 40 report working unassigned hours. Clearly, unassigned work time is the norm in the District, irrespective of where an EA works.

While unassigned and unpaid work is clearly a widespread in the District phenomenon, there are variances in the amount of this time that EAs log on the job. The following table shows the reported breakdown in levels of unassigned/unpaid work for those completing the survey.

### If yes, how many extra hours per week do you work beyond your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?

Hours of Unpaid Work Performed	Number	% of Total
Less than 1	17	18.5%
1	21	22.8%
2	14	15.2%
3	4	4.3%
4	5	5.4%
5	2	2.2%
Over 5	12	13.0%
Null responses	17	18.5%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

The above information makes it possible to calculate average weekly-unpaid work. If we assume that those reporting 'less than one hour' work .5 unpaid hours per week, and those working 'over 5 hours' work an average of six hours, total reported unpaid time for those completing the survey comes to 171.5 hours per week. This means that, *each EA in the district logs an average of 2.3 hours of*

## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

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*unpaid work in the district each week.* A figure of this magnitude works out to 8.5 per cent of average assigned/paid hours in the District.

At a rate of \$23.13 per hour for the larger 'Instructional' category, 171.5 weekly hours of unpaid work represents a total of \$3,967 in wages not collected. Over the normal course of a 40-week school year, the total value of unpaid time comes to \$158,672. When wage sensitive pension and other benefits are factored in (at roughly 15 per cent of total wage costs), *the total annual value of this unpaid time comes to \$182,473.*

Education assistants also report working unpaid hours at various times and points during the week. The following chart shows that the largest EA group – just under one in five of those completing the survey – report performing this type of work one day a week. Smaller, but still significant percentages, report working more days per week in an unpaid capacity.

**If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, on how many days per week do you work outside your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?**

Frequency of unpaid work	Number	% of Total
1 day per week	17	18.5%
2 days per week	12	13.0%
3 days per week	12	13.0%
4 days per week	13	14.1%
5 days per week	9	9.8%
Null responses	29	31.5%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

Education assistants also perform unpaid work at various times of the day. The following table shows the percentages reporting unpaid work at specified times during the day.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For this question and the two that follow, more than one response is possible so the percentage values do not add up to a total of 100.

## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

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**If you work more hours than your assignment, when is it?  
(Fill in as many items as apply)**

<b>When unpaid work occurs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
During breaks	35	46.7%
During lunch	34	45.3%
Before shift	50	66.7%
After shift	67	89.3%
At home	43	57.3%

The largest percentage appears to log unpaid work time either before or after shift. However, as can be seen from the data in the table, a substantial number of Education Assistants in District 40 report logging unpaid time at points during the work day as well as at home.

Many EAs also log unpaid time at multiple points in time during the workday. A total of 19 of 92 survey respondents (20.7 per cent) reported working in two of the above categories (during breaks, during lunch, before shift, after shift, or at home). A total of 18.5 per cent reported working at three times of the day while 13.0 per cent reported four times. The following table provides a breakdown of reported combinations.

**When is unpaid work performed?**

<b>Times of Unpaid Work</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total</b>
In two different time periods	19	20.7%
In three different time periods	17	18.5%
In four different time periods	12	13.0%
In all five time periods	15	16.3%

From the data in the above table, we can see that almost 48 per cent of EAs work during at least three different unpaid time periods. This likely means that a substantial percentage of all EAs in the District have no effective break times during these workdays.

Survey respondents were also asked to describe what tasks or activities they were involved with while working unpaid time. The following summarizes survey responses, in descending order of frequency.

Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

**If you work more hours than your assignment, is it to,  
(Fill in as many items as apply)**

Task or activity undertaken during unpaid work time	Number	% of total
Consult with teachers or principals	58	63.0%
Prepare materials	55	59.8%
Go on field trips	25	27.2%
School or OHS Committee attendance	25	27.2%
Coverage outside assigned time because parent is late	18	19.6%
Coverage outside assigned time for problem behavior by students	14	15.2%
Pre-school preparation & monitoring	14	15.2%
Coverage outside assigned time for other reasons	13	14.1%
Coverage outside assigned time to accommodate transportation scheduling	13	14.1%
Drills, assemblies	6	6.5%

Clearly, the predominant activities undertaken by EAs relate to consultation with work colleagues and preparation of materials required for their work. As both of these activities refer to core work activities requires for the performance of EA jobs, it is apparent that EAs through the contribution of unassigned time are actively contributing their own time in efforts to make the performance of their jobs possible.

Significant time is also devoted to accompanying students on field trips. In addition, the various 'coverage' issues itemized in the above table show that EAs are actively backfilling school timetables with their own time to ensure that students are not left unattended during the time they are at school.

The fourth item in the chart – School or OHS Committee attendance – draws attention to a specific health and safety concern of EAs. Having this activity cited here means that EAs participate in this committee work on their own time, while co-workers in other job areas have similar time paid by the District. Among other things, this type of situation can be expected to reduce the average level of EA participation in this important committee work.

An important aspect of the situation with unpaid work is the question of why. What follows is the pattern of responses to the following survey question.

## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

### Why do you work more hours per week than you are assigned?

Reason	Number	% of Total
Impossible to work assigned hours and provide good service	63	68.5%
Feel pressure from teachers	10	10.9%
Feel pressure from co-workers	6	6.5%
Feel pressure from principals	5	5.4%
Other	29	31.5%

As is clear, over two-thirds of those logging unpaid time said they did so because felt it was impossible to do a good job otherwise. At the same time, relatively few cited pressure from others – whether principals, teachers or co-workers.

A substantial number did however opt for the ‘Other’ response, and chose to provide more detailed comments to explain their choice. Here, many EAs cited what are best characterized as ‘professional’ reasons for agreeing to perform unpaid work. The following is a sample of comments within this category.

Why I work unpaid hours: professional responses
<p>“Otherwise I have no time to get a clear understanding of what the student's needs are.” - Elementary level assistant</p>
<p>“I have a variety of other duties. Like shopping for the Lunch program. Like administrative duties. Like intake/school registration. This is an alternate program.” - Alternate program assistant</p>
<p>“I feel a need to support school responsibility. I feel a need to be part of the school community. And I want to support school staff.” - Elementary level assistant</p>
<p>“My student needs services at other times.” - High school level assistant</p>

Many EAs drew attention to ‘lack of full coverage’ concerns. In many cases, these relate to transportation scheduling problems that would otherwise leave students unattended, or pose health and safety risks. Sample comments in this area are provided in the following table.

Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

<b>Why I work unpaid hours: coverage problems and student transportation</b>
"No one else can stay to wait for the taxi with my student. Principle/teachers are not available to leave the student with." - Elementary level assistant
"Cabs come late on occasion to pick up the student." - Elementary level assistant
"I have monitor duty outside from 8:30 - 9:00 am every day." - Elementary level assistant
"We have a lack of coverage because there are no subs." - Elementary level assistant

Other EAs drew attention to the chronic lack of time to do necessary preparation for their jobs or to prepare modified materials for use in their work. The following table offers responses falling within this general theme.

<b>Why I work unpaid hours: time for preparation or for modifying materials</b>
"I would like to be prepared and organized as well as ready for unexpected activities or events." - Elementary level assistant
"I need it to get my student to meet the curriculum." - High school level assistant
"It makes my work day go more smoothly if all my prep work is done before school starts." - Elementary level assistant
"I use it for reviewing necessary materials for the next teaching day and for making or providing adapted materials. Also for documentation of the student's progress." - Elementary level assistant

Education assistants were also asked whether they would prefer to have more assigned hours. The following table summarizes their responses.

**Would you prefer more paid hours of work in your assignment?**

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	80	87.0%
No	7	7.6%
Null responses	5	5.4%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

As is evident, a sizeable percentage – about seven out of eight completing the survey – indicated they would like additional assigned and paid hours. With a high percentage indicating they log unpaid work time because they feel they cannot do a proper and quality job within allocated time, this is not surprising. What this reflects is the fact that EAs feel they should be paid for this additional time and a belief that the best way to accomplish this is for the employer to allocate more assigned work time.

EAs were asked to elaborate as to how extra assigned time might best be allocated. The following breakdown emerged from the surveys.

**If the answer to the previous question is yes, what would you want more time for: (Fill in as many items as apply)**

Response	Number	% of total surveys	% of those indicating they wanted more work time
Meeting time with teachers or administrators	69	75.0%	86.3%
Contact with students	56	60.9%	70.0%
Preparation time for work	34	37.0%	42.5%
Other	10	10.9%	12.3%

The largest groups of responses centre here on the need for time to consult with teachers and administrators, or to have additional contact with students. A substantial block also resurfaced the issue of needing preparation time at this juncture.

There were also a number of ‘Other’ responses. Many EAs chose to reiterate or emphasize priorities identified in the preceding table. However, others chose to draw attention to other issues. The following table offers a small sample of the kinds of things cited.

**How additional time would best be allocated: other responses**

<p>“Program planning.” - Elementary level assistant</p>
<p>“Administrative duties.” - Alternate program assistant</p>
<p>“Contact time with parents.” - Elementary level assistant</p>
<p>“Field trips and community interaction.” - High school level assistant</p>
<p>“After school programs.” - Elementary level assistant</p>

These comments reflect a level of EA interest in broadening opportunities for proper planning and administration of their work. They also articulate an interest in having stronger connections into the school community and with parents, connections often frustrated by the practice of ‘bell-to-bell’ timetabling.

The survey also asked EAs for information regarding whether they reported all hours worked on time sheets, or just assigned hours. The following response pattern was indicated.

**Do you put all the hours worked, both assigned and unassigned, on your time sheet or just assigned hours?**

Response	Number	% of total
Just assigned	73	79.3%
All hours	14	15.2%
Null responses	5	5.4%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

As can be seen, a very large majority of EAs – close to four out of five – report just assigned hours on time sheets. Only about 15 per cent said they reported all hours.

If assigned hours are typically the only hours recorded on time sheets, the question arises as to how EAs document unpaid work time. To investigate this area further, survey respondents were asked to indicate whether their working unassigned and unpaid hours was something their principal had knowledge of. As they following table shows, responses were fairly evenly split on this issue.

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**Does your principal know that you work more hours than you are assigned?**

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	38	41.3%
No	34	37.0%
Null responses	20	21.7%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

Just over 40 per cent of survey respondents indicated their principals were aware while over 37 per cent said they were not. What this result indicates is the presence in a substantial number of school sites of an agreed upon if informal working arrangement guiding the provision of unassigned and unpaid hours. At the same time, it demonstrates the lack of any such arrangement in a substantial number of school sites throughout the District.

For those who indicated their principals knew about the accumulation of unpaid hours, the primary way of their knowing this came from having had conversations with their principals on the topic. The following table offers further detail about this area.

**If the answer to the previous question is 'yes', how do you know that the principal knows?**

Response	Number	% of those answering 'Yes'
S/he spoke to me about it	4	10.5%
I told him/her	6	15.8%
Both	25	65.8%
Null responses	3	9.9%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>38</b>	

Survey respondents also commented on further aspects of arrangements in place, specifically provisions covering when and if unpaid work time was recouped from the employer. The following table shows the breakdown of responses that resulted.

**Is there an arrangement with the principal to bank your hours worked that are beyond your assigned hours?**

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	42	45.7%
No	17	18.5%
Do not know	25	27.2%
Null responses	8	8.7%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

In close to half the cases, EAs report the existence of a banking arrangement. A smaller percentage said that such an arrangement did not exist while more than a quarter said they did not know if such an arrangement was in place.

**If the answer is yes, when does the principal ask you to take the banked hours?**

Half of those completing the survey offered responses to this question. EAs generally indicated that the arrangement have them take banked time during professional development days, at times when field trips are scheduled or when students are absent from school. In a smaller number of instances, the taking of banked time is done in a more *ad hoc* manner (“at my convenience”, “during slow periods” or “when there are early dismissals.”) As the following table indicates, a high degree of informality characterizes most arrangements

**If there is an arrangement, is it,**

Response	Number	% of Total
Formal	9	9.8%
Informal	37	40.2%
Null responses	46	50.0%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

More than four of five substantive answers to this question indicated that arrangements for the use of banked time were informal in nature.

The survey also asked a series of questions regarding what EAs did to augment income received from their employment with the District. The first question asked was whether individuals worked at other jobs. The following table shows the pattern of responses.

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## Education Assistants and Unpaid Work In New Westminster School District

### Do you have a second job outside the school district?

Response	Number	% of Total
Yes	48	52.2%
No	35	38.0%
Null responses	9	9.8%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>92</b>	

The data shows that over half of EA survey respondents reported working at another job. Clearly additional employment is the norm amongst EAs. Individuals were also asked why they had another job.

### If yes, what are the main reasons you have another job?

(Fill in as many items as apply)

Reason	Responses	% of Total	% of those answering 'Yes' to previous question
I need the extra money	47	51.1%	97.9%
I am looking to move to a job	5	5.4%	10.4%
My other job pays better	5	5.4%	10.4%
Other	10	10.9%	20.8%

Reasons offered centred on the need of many EAs to supplement their earnings and, to a lesser extent, on individuals' search for better pay or for alternate career opportunities.

The survey also asked people to comment on how many hours they worked in other non-school district employment. The following table shows the breakdown of responses.

**Approximately how many hours a week on average do you work at your other job?**

Hours per week	Responses	% of all Surveys	% of Surveys Reporting Other Employment
Up to 5	6	6.5%	13.0%
6 to 10	20	21.7%	43.5%
10 to 15	7	7.6%	15.2%
15 to 20	4	4.3%	8.7%
Over 20	9	9.8%	19.6%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>46</b>		

Exactly half of the total survey responses reported specific hours of additional employment. Some 26 EAs answering this question said they worked ten or fewer hours per week at other jobs while the remainder reported working over ten hours per week. Overall, for the 46 EAs reporting hours, the average time worked in outside places of employment was 13.3 hours per week.

EAs were also asked to comment in an open-ended fashion regarding the impact there would be if they refused to contribute unpaid work hours. A total of 68 responses were provided to this question. The sheer range of issues, concerns and negative potential impacts raised warrant quoting a sizeable sample of these comments verbatim at this point.

**What would happen to the service to the child if you only did your assigned hours and not extra hours?**

"Students would not able to successfully participate with their peers."
"It would put more pressure on other staff members to prepare the materials."
"My student would get into trouble with other students because of poor social skills."
"There would be financial consequences to the program if I didn't get the paperwork done (IEPs)"
"My student would miss out on field trips that are educational & beneficial to them."
"When students are in crisis there would be no one around to help them or to spend one to one time with them."
"The child would be behind in what the class is doing. The information presented may not be clear, visually understood by the student."
"In worst case scenario, a child could be sent home to an unsafe dangerous environment."

By and large, EA's commented on one of six types of impact. Many EAs said they would lack sufficient time to prepare for the work they perform with students on a daily basis. A similar number said that student achievement would suffer directly as a result. Some indicate their students' programs in the schools would be incomplete in some important way. Others cite concerns for student safety owing to lack of full supervision or coverage. Still others say there would be an increased likelihood that some students could become disruptive within their classroom or school settings.

These comments speak clearly to problems avoided and benefits derived by virtue of strong and widespread EA commitment to the health, well being and education of the students they work with.

Many EAs used the "Other Comment" section of the survey to reiterate issues and concerns expressed elsewhere. In some cases, other issues surfaced. Some of the specific issues raised were:

- Overall work hours needs to be increased,
- Various professional-type concerns about being seen as part of the school team and about having their specific contribution to the education of students fully recognized,
- The need to have preparation time fully acknowledged.
- The need to having planning and communication time with other school staff clearly acknowledged.
- The need to replace absentee EAs on the job.

### **Summary of findings**

At this point, survey findings can be summarized in point form.

- Hours for EAs are, on average, well below the threshold of full FTE. This applies even at the secondary level where more hours on average are allocated to EAs.
- The overwhelming majority of EAs log unassigned and unpaid work time in their jobs.
- An average EA performs additional unpaid work of about 2.3 hours a week. This unpaid work time calculates has an annual equivalent dollar value in excess of \$180,000.
- Work is performed at various points in the work day as well as at home, with most EAs reporting that they log unpaid work at multiple points before, during and outside of the work day.

- EAs perform unpaid work largely for professional reasons – a perception the work cannot be done to a quality standard without the performance of additional hours, or a perception that students will lose out or be put at risk if unpaid hours are not logged.
- EAs generally record only assigned time on time sheets.
- A substantial number of EAs have an unofficial arrangement with school administrators for dealing with unpaid and unassigned time.
- Most EAs would want more assigned hours if they were able to get them, citing the need for preparation time, time to meet with work colleagues, or more contact time with students.
- A large block of EAs work at other jobs with the main reason cited as the need for more income.
- EA survey comments show a high level of professional commitment to their work, their classrooms, their schools and, most importantly, their students.

### **Comment**

Unassigned and unpaid work is clearly a norm for Education Assistants in District 40 New Westminster. The phenomenon of unpaid work is itself the product of compressed work hours and the pressurized situation that working 'bell to bell' creates for EAs in the district. It is this work environment that places most EAs in a position of contributing unpaid work hours. Most cite professional concerns for students including a perceived obligation to do a quality job as the predominant reasons for their acquiescing to these kinds of arrangements.

These findings raise a number of disturbing implications:

- The District is benefiting from the commitment of their special education support staff without providing the full benefit of collective agreement provisions covering wages, hours of work, and overtime. In effect, EAs' unpaid work is subsidizing the District to a substantial degree in its efforts to offer special education services to students.
- EAs are intended to work under the supervision of teachers. However, the compression of paid work time inherent in the current scheduling system makes it difficult if not impossible for time to be scheduled for EA-teacher meetings or consultation to take place. What this suggests is that teacher supervision or direction of EAs may occur in a haphazard manner and, where it does occur, it is largely dependent on the voluntary contribution of unpaid EA work time.

- EAs contribute unpaid time while wanting more assigned and paid work hours. The lack of a living annualized wage also contributes directly to decisions to seek additional work in other jobs with a large percentage of staff. The District loses in the sense that many staff could at times find themselves spread too thin in terms of concentration, stress or fatigue.
- There are clear health and safety issues raised by evident lack of full student coverage during the workday. EAs report that students would be “at risk” in the absence of unpaid voluntary work time. Although the survey did not address this issue squarely, responses to other survey questions suggest that many parents of special needs students may be unaware of this issue. There would be clear and major liability issues for the District should any misfortune befall a special education student during a time when regularly scheduled coverage for that student is not in effect.

### **Recommendations**

New Westminster Education Assistants participating in the survey have offered their School District and union local a unique opportunity to understand factors and dynamics associated with the phenomenon of unpaid EA work.

From the Union’s vantage point, the pattern of responses found in the survey and analyzed in this document point to a series of recommendations which could effectively address the problem of ‘unpaid work.’ These recommendations are:

- More hours need to be scheduled for EAs. In addition, there needs to be an official acknowledgement on the part of the District that the ‘bell to bell’ scheduling that characterizes much EA work (particularly at the elementary level) is the source of most of the problems associated with unpaid work.
- There needs to be better recognition and acknowledgement of the realities of time pressures affecting EA work. Specifically, this would involve recognized time for preparation, planning, consultation and meetings.
- There is a need for more formal inclusion of EAs into school-level processes associated with the monitoring and evaluation of special needs students as well as planning and communication requirements associated with these tasks. Currently the lack of scheduled EA time for these activities can only compromise consistent EA involvement in these areas.
- EAs need to feel like they are more a part of the ‘school community.’
- EAs need to be able to take work breaks like other colleagues without facing pressure to backfill the absences of others, to cover students who

might otherwise be unattended, or to make on-the-spot adjustments in preparation for the class or assignment to come.

- The District needs to acknowledge the lack of an annual living EA wage for those employed by the District and the consequent need for many EAs to seek additional outside work in order to “pay the bills.”
- The District also needs to acknowledge that widespread EA “moonlighting” in other paid employment does not serve it well in its efforts to provide the best educational coverage to its special needs students.

**Appendix: The Survey Instrument**

**EA QUESTIONNAIRE**

*CUPE Local 406 ~ New Westminister School District # 40*

1. What is your formal job title?  
 Instructional  
 Behavioural  
 Medical
  
  2. Is most or all of your assigned work directed to one (1) student?  
 Yes  
 No
  
  3. Do you work at:  
 Elementary School  
 High School
  
  4. How many total EA hours a week (regular & temporary) are you assigned?
- 
5. Do you put in extra time, over and above your regular & temporary assigned hours?  
 Yes  
 No
  
  6. If **yes**, how many extra hours **per week** do you work beyond your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?  
 less than 1 hour  
 1 hour  
 2 hours

- 3 hours
  - 4 hours
  - 5 hours
  - Over 5 hours \_\_\_\_\_ (if over 5 hours, how many in a typical week?)
7. If **yes** to question 5, on how many days per week do you work outside your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?
- 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - 3 days per week
  - 4 days per week
  - 5 or more days per week
8. If you work more hours than your assignment, is it:  
(Fill in as many items as apply)
- During breaks
  - During lunch
  - Before shift
  - After shift
  - At home
9. If you work more hours than your assignment, is it to:  
(Fill in as many items as apply)
- Prepare materials for your assignment
  - Consult with teachers or the principals or others
  - Provide coverage of child outside assigned hours:
    - a. Problematic behaviour of student at the end of the day
    - b. Transportation scheduling
    - c. Parent late picking up child
    - d. Lack of coverage and unfilled absences
  - Pre-school preparation & monitoring
  - Drills, assemblies
  - Field trips

School or OHS Committee

10. Why do you work more hours per week than you are assigned?

(Fill in as many items as apply)

Impossible to work assigned hours and provide good service

Feel pressure from principals

Feel pressure from teachers

Feel pressure from coworkers

Other (please describe briefly)

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11. Would you prefer more paid hours of work in your assignment?

Yes

No

If **yes**, would you want more time for:

(Fill in as many items as apply)

Contact time with students

Preparation time for work with students

Meeting time with teachers or administrators

Other (specify)

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12. Do you put all the hours worked, both assigned and unassigned, on your time sheet or just assigned hours?

Just assigned hours

All hours

13. Does your principal know that you work more hours than you are assigned?

Yes

No

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14. If the answer to the previous question is **yes**, how do you know that the principal knows?
- I told him/her
  - He/She spoke to me about it
  - Both of the above
15. Is there an arrangement with the principal to bank your hours worked that are beyond your assigned hours?
- Yes
  - No
  - Do not know
16. If the answer is **yes**, when does the principal ask you to take the banked hours?
- 
- 
17. If there is an arrangement, is it:
- A formal arrangement, recorded on a time card and pay slip
  - An informal arrangement, "in-house" at the school
18. Do you have a second job outside the school district?
- Yes
  - No
19. If **yes**, what are the main reasons you have another job?  
(Fill in as many items as apply)
- I need the extra money to make ends meet
  - I am looking to move to a job elsewhere
  - My other job pays better

Other (specify)

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20. Approximately how many hours a week on average do you work at your other job?

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21. What would happen to the service to the child if you only did your assigned hours and not extra hours?

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22. Other Comments:

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