The Manitoba Teachers' Society
Disability Benefits Plan

THE SEVEN OAKS SCHOOL DIVISION WELLNESS PROJECT REPORT

HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

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Produced By

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Members of the Steering Committee devoted many hours to this wellness project. This included: establishing related goals and objectives, approving the study questionnaire, working with staff to ensure an optimal response rate, setting study benchmarks, reviewing the preliminary data and draft reports, identifying individuals to participate in the staff focus groups, and working with their colleagues to develop the study recommendations. The time and enthusiasm of all **Seven Oaks School Division** representatives of the Committee reflects its commitment to the wellness of its employees.

The author acknowledges the **MTS Disability Benefits Plan's** ongoing commitment to employee wellness. Not only did representatives of the Plan attend all meetings of the Steering Committee, but it also shared the costs associated with this report and the related initial wellness planning processes.

Last, but most importantly, the author acknowledges the many **divisional employees** who completed and returned their questionnaires, and those who participated in the employee focus groups. Their time and thoughts were essential elements in the success of this process.

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I) BACKGROUND:

The **Seven Oaks School Division**, in partnership with the **Manitoba Teachers' Society Disability Benefits Plan**, has undertaken a research study and planning process related to the wellness of its employees. **Kaplan Research Associates Inc.** was engaged to design and administer this process. The costs of the Wellness Project were shared by the Plan and the Division. This project was undertaken under the auspices of a broadly-based ***Steering Committee***. An employee questionnaire was developed specifically for this study using, as a template, a research instrument that had been used by the Researchers for six previous school division wellness processes. This questionnaire was administered to all Seven Oaks School Division employees. In addition, the Researchers facilitated five employee focus groups, along with the results of several Strategic Planning process undertaken with the Steering Committee.

This report presents the **Highlights** of the survey and focus group results. A fully annotated **Technical Report** of the findings is available through the school division. This includes the study methodology, detailed research findings, and an appendix including tables of the findings based on respondents' gender and ages.

1.1) Areas Of Inquiry Addressed Through The Study Questionnaire:

The areas of inquiry explored through this study included:

- Descriptive information about study respondents,
- How respondents evaluate their workplaces,
- Exploring respondents' work and life wellness issues,
- Respondents' coping strategies, and
- Respondents' intentions regarding future employment:

1.2) Establishing Study Benchmarks:

Benchmarks are standards that facilitate the objective assessment of evaluation findings. They help to determine which findings are considered positive, overall; which findings are considered moderately positive; and which findings indicate the need for change. The benchmarks for this study, established by the Steering Committee, are:

Primary Benchmark *(Overall Positive Findings)*	75.0%+ of respondents indicating positive responses [1]
Secondary Benchmark *(Moderately Positive Findings)*	60.0% to 74.9% of respondents indicating positive responses
Tertiary Benchmark *(Areas Requiring Attention and/or Remediation)*	<60.0% of respondents indicating positive responses

PART ONE: THE RESULTS OF THE WELLNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

I) THE STUDY RESPONSE RATE:

Of the 1,124 potential respondents, 579 completed questionnaires were returned, resulting in ***a response rate of 51.5%***. This is considered a positive rate of return.

[1] This relates to the percentage of respondents indicating 'very good' + 'good'; 'very much' + 'somewhat'; and so on, to specific questions.

II) A PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THIS STUDY:

This section provides a brief description of the employees who completed a Wellness Questionnaire.

- Just under three-quarters of all respondents were female (71.6%).
- The largest percentage of respondents were from 35 to 50 years of age, followed by those 51 years of age and over (44.0% and 35.3%, respectively).
- By occupation, over half of all respondents were Teachers (57.7%), followed by Paraprofessionals (17.4%).
- On average, each respondent had worked in their current occupations for 15.7 years, in this school division for 14.3 years, and at their current locations for 7.7 years.
- Unlike other school division wellness studies conducted by the Researchers, this division wanted to hear from employees who were on leaves of absence during the administration of the study. Forty-one of these employees completed a questionnaire.

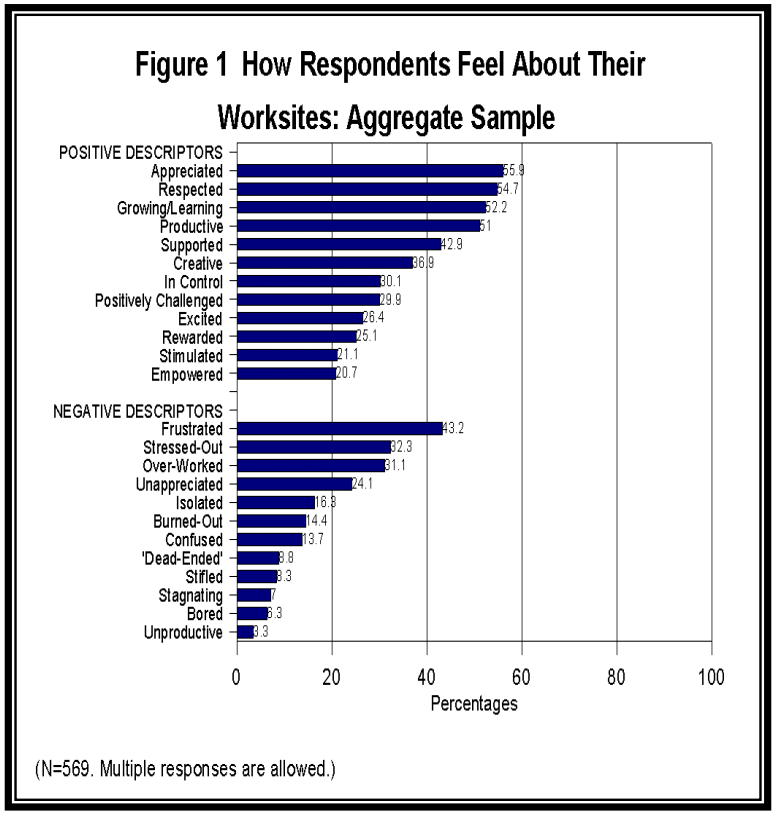
III) RESPONDENTS EVALUATING THEIR WORKPLACES:

3.1) Respondents' Feelings About Where They Work:

When respondents were asked to select among 12 Positive and 12 Negative Descriptors regarding their feelings about their workplaces, there were only four Positive Descriptors that were identified by the majority of these respondents: feeling Appreciated (55.9%), Respected (54.7%), that they were Growing and Learning (52.2%), and/or Productive (51.0%) (Figure 1). Another 42.9% felt that they were Supported at work. These results are considered only moderately positive, with significant room to improve.

The most frequent Negative Descriptors identified by respondents was feeling Frustrated (43.2%), followed by feeling Stressed-Out and Over-Worked (32.3% and 31.1%, respectively).

There were many statistically significant differences in the Positive and Negative Descriptors selected, based on respondents' occupations. On average, Principals and Vice-Principals selected the largest mean number of Positive Descriptors (7) and the smallest number of Negative Descriptors (2.3) when compared with other occupational groups. Some of the related highlights included:



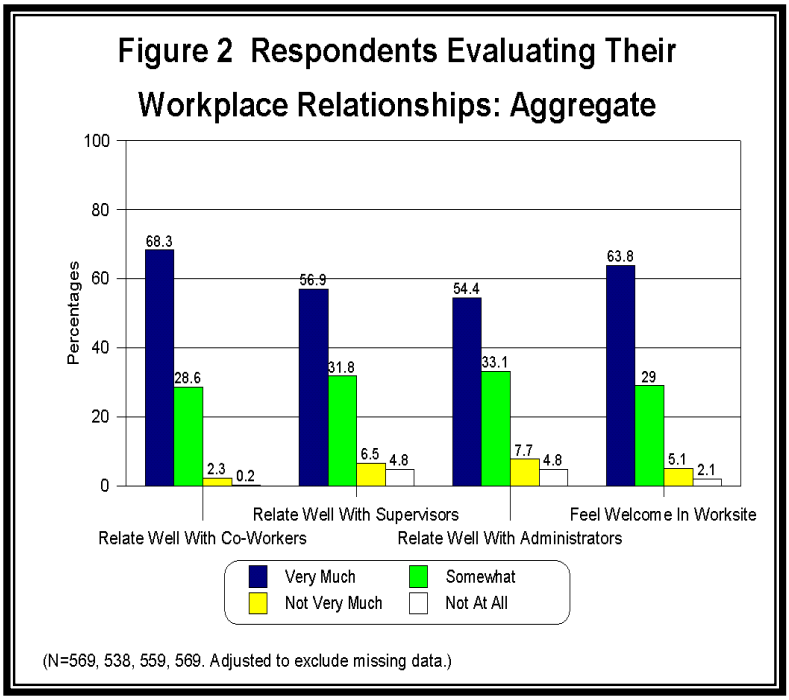
- Clerical staff were much more likely to feel appreciated (82.8%).
- Teachers, Administrators, and Clerical staff were more likely to feel Respected at work, than were the Paraprofessionals; Maintenance personnel, Custodians and Bus Drivers (the M-C-B Group); and those in "Other" positions.
- Teachers and Administrators were more likely to feel that they were Growing and Learning on the job.

- Administrators and Clerical staff were more likely to feel that they were Productive at work.
- Administrators were much more likely than all other employees to feel: Supported, Creative, In Control, Positively Challenged, Excited, Rewarded, and Stimulated, by their work.
- Conversely, members of the M-C-B Group were more likely to feel: Stressed-Out and Unappreciated.

3.2) Respondents Evaluating Their Workplace Relationships:

In the aggregate, a large majority of all respondents felt that they related well with their co-workers (96.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this comment); that they feel welcome in their worksites (92.8%); that they relate well with their Supervisors (88.7%); and that they relate well with their Administrators (87.5%) (Figure 2).

There were significant variations in responses to two of these questions by respondents' occupations.



- Respondents in the M-C-B Group were least likely to relate well with their immediate Supervisors (56.4% compared with a mean of 88.7% for all respondents).
- These same respondents were also least likely to relate well with their Administrators (57.9% compared with a mean of 87.5%).

3.3) Respondents Evaluating Environmental Attributes Or Characteristics Of Their Worksites:

3.3.1) Evaluating The Importance Of Workplace Attributes or Characteristics:

Based on the benchmarks established for this study, respondents, overall, felt that all of the ***physical attributes or characteristics*** included in this study were either important or very important to ensure a healthy workplace. Key among these were:

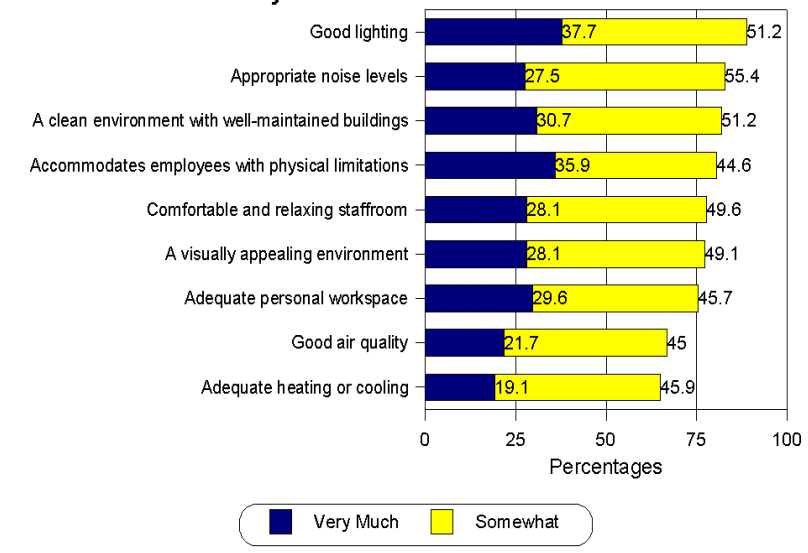
- Good air quality,
- A clean environment with well-maintained buildings,
- Adequate heating and cooling,
- Good lighting,
- Adequate personal workspaces,
- Appropriate noise levels, and
- Ensuring that worksites can accommodate employees with physical limitations.

There were many ***social attributes or characteristics*** that were also identified as being very important for a healthy workplace (Figure 3). These included:

- A friendly environment,
- Promoting and exercising effective problem solving, communication and decision-making,

- Providing realistic and clear expectations of all employees,
- Supporting employees who are experiencing stress and anxiety,
- Promoting good rapport between the school, and students and their parents,
- Promoting a focus on student learning,
- Positive relationships with their Administrators and Supervisors, and
- Facilitating a work and life balance for its employees.

Figure 3 Evaluating Whether Workplaces Possess Physical Attributes Or Characteristics



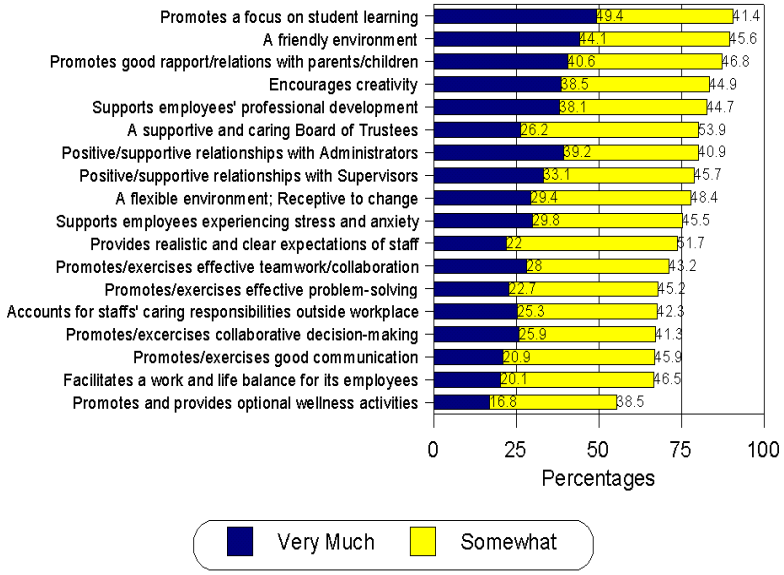
(N=567, 568, 570, 567, 564, 564, 562, 564, 568. Adjusted to exclude missing data.)

3.3.2) Evaluating Whether Positive Workplace Attributes or Characteristics Exist:

The physical attributes and characteristics that respondents most frequently felt existed in their workplaces included, in ranked order (Figure 4):

- Good lighting,[1]
- Appropriate noise levels,
- A clean environment with well-maintained buildings,
- Accommodating employees with physical limitations,
- A comfortable and relaxing staffroom,
- A visually pleasing environment, and
- Adequate personal workspaces.

Figure 4 Evaluating Whether Workplaces Possess Social Attributes Or Characteristics



(N=541,562, 554, 564, 559, 549, 558, 543, 568, 560, 559, 567, 564, 558, 567, 564, 561, 558. Adjusted to exclude missing data.)

There were many social attributes or characteristics of the workplace that a notable percentage of the respondents felt were 'very much' or 'somewhat' in place (again meeting or exceeding the **Primary Benchmark**). Most notable among these were:

- Promoting a focus on student learning,

[1] Responses regarding all of these physical elements met or exceeded the study's ***Primary Benchmark***.

- Providing a friendly environment,
- Promoting good rapport between the school and the students and their parents,
- Encouraging creativity,
- Supporting employees' professional development,
- A supportive and caring Board of Trustees,
- Positive and supportive relationships with their Administrators and Supervisors,
- A flexible environment that is receptive to change, and
- Supporting employees who are experiencing stress and anxiety.

IV) RESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH NEGATIVE STRESS:

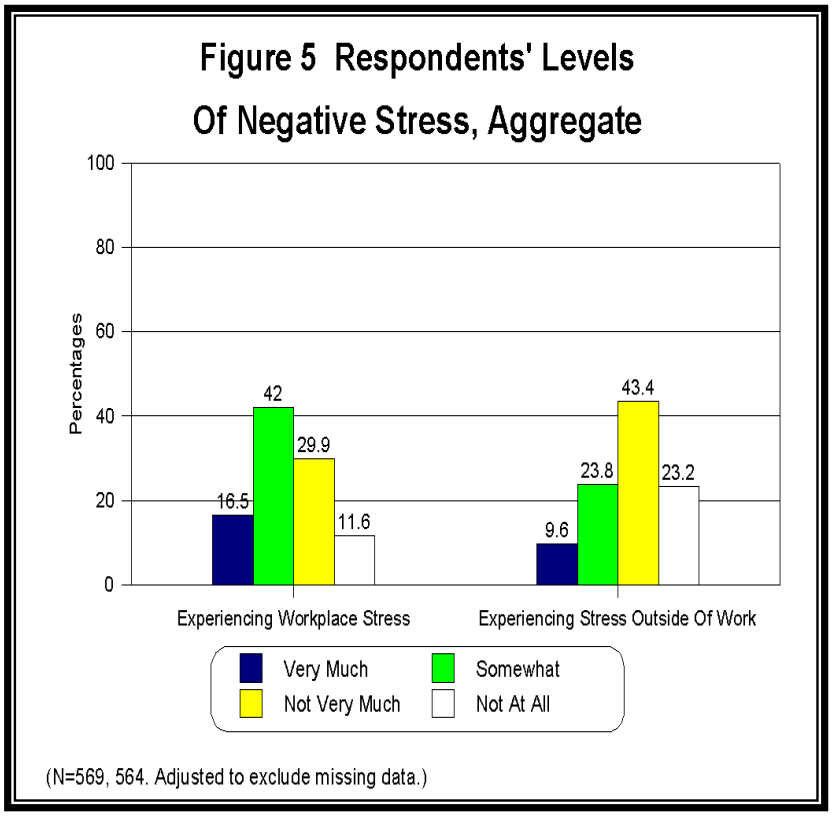
4.1) The Prevalence Of Negative Stress:

In the aggregate, 58.5% of all respondents reported experiencing at least some negative workplace stress, while 33.4% experienced at least some negative stress outside of the workplace (Figure 5). In terms of the former, this reflects 333 individual employees. In terms of the latter, this reflects 188 employees.

Respondents' experiences with negative workplace stress varied significantly based on their occupations. Respondents in the M-C-B Group were most likely to report very much or some negative stress at work (66.7%), followed by the Teachers (59.9%). This trend did not apply to negative stress experienced outside of the workplace.

Female respondents were significantly more likely than the males to experience negative stress at work.

Respondents' ages did not influence the amount of stress they reported, either at work or outside the workplace.



The prevalence of negative workplace stress correlated significantly with the degree to which respondents:

- Relating well with their co-workers,
- Relating well with their immediate Supervisors,
- Relating well with their Administrators, and
- Feeling welcome at their worksites.

The prevalence of negative workplace stress also correlated significantly with many of the 24 Descriptors included in this study. That is, respondents who reported much or some negative stress at work were significantly more likely to identify Negative Descriptors, while those who

reported little or no negative stress at work were significantly more likely to identify Positive Descriptors.

4.2) Comparing Optimal And Experienced Levels Of Stress:

Based on the concept that some stress is necessary for a well-functioning and dynamic workplace, respondents were asked two questions. First, they were asked to identify where they fell on a 30-point *Likert scale* regarding the amount of stress they required to work optimally. Then they were asked to identify where they fell on this same scale regarding their current levels of stress. The purpose of these two questions was to track the variation in the responses to the first and second scales. The following findings emerged:

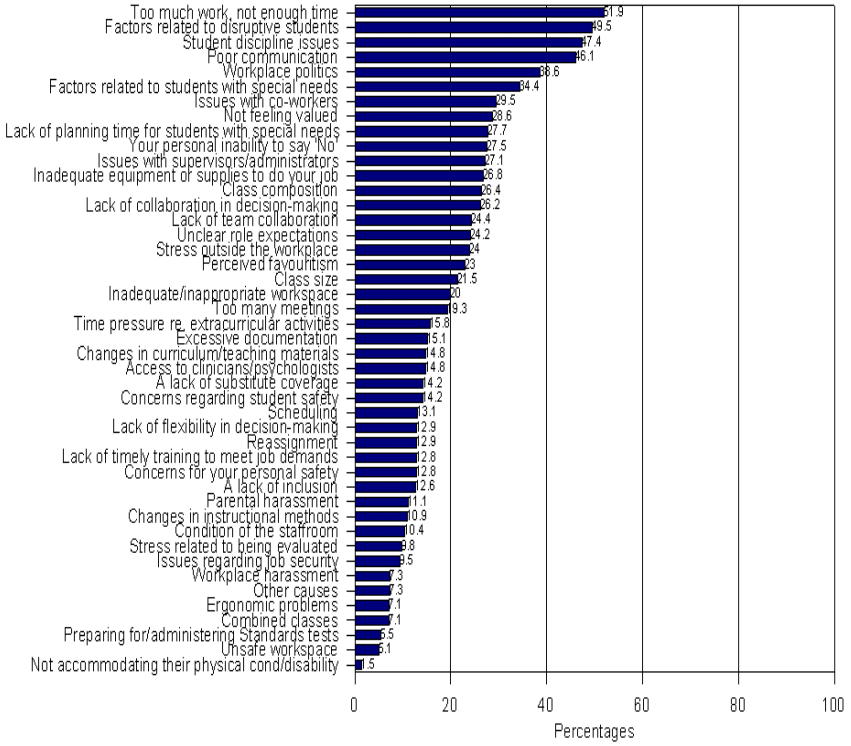
- The mean level of optimal stress was 11.6 (the 39th percentile), while the mean level of experienced stress was 15.9 (the 53rd percentile).
- With one exception, there was relatively little variation in the levels of optimal stress identified by all respondents (ranging from a low of 11.3 to a high of 13.8). Respondents in the M-C-B Group reported the lowest optimal stress scores (8.6).
- Conversely, respondents in the M-C-B Group reported the highest scores regarding perceived experienced stress (17.4), followed by Teachers and respondents in the "Other" occupations group (16.1 and 16.2).
- The amount of stress reported by respondents correlated significantly with the variance of optimal to experienced stress.

4.3) The Causes Of Work-place Stress:

In the aggregate, the most frequent causes of negative workplace stress included:

- Too much work, not enough time (51.9%) (Figure 6),
- Factors related to disruptive students (49.5%),
- Student discipline issues (47.4%),
- Poor communication (46.1%),
- Workplace politics (38.6%), and
- Factors related to students with special needs (34.4%).
- There was a statistically significant correlation between the number of stress factors identified by respondents and their reported levels of stress.

Figure 6 If Respondents Experienced Negative Workplace Stress, What Caused This? Aggregate



(N=549. Multiple responses are allowed.*Of respondents reporting being affected by stress.)

Respondents' occupations played an important role regarding their reported causes of stress. For **Teachers**, the most frequently reported causes of stress included:

- Factors related to disruptive students (59.6%),
- Too much work and not enough time (59.0%),
- Student discipline issues (53.3%),
- Poor communication (43.8%),
- Factors related to students with special needs (43.5%),
- Class composition (41.3%),
- Workplace politics (38.2%),
- Class size (34.7%), and
- A lack of planning time for students with special needs (34.1%).

For **Adminstrators** the most frequently identified stress factors included:

- Too much work and not enough time (71.4%),
- Factors regarding disruptive students (52.4%),
- Students with discipline issues (38.1%), and
- Workplace politics (38.1%).

For **Clerical staff** the most frequent stress factors were:

- Poor communication (53.8%),
- Too much work and not enough time (50.0%),
- A lack of substitutes (38.5%), and
- Workplace politics (34.6%).

Paraprofessionals were most likely to identify the following stress factors:

- Student discipline issues (58.5%),
- Poor communication (54.3%),
- Factors related to disruptive students (50.0%),
- Workplace politics (41.5%),
- A lack of planning time for students with special needs (39.4%),
- Factors regarding students with special needs (38.3%),
- A lack of collaborative decision-making (37.2%), and
- A lack of team collaboration (36.2%).

While other occupational groups cited stress factors related to the education field, respondents in **Maintenance, Custodial and Bus Driving positions** were most likely to **i**dentify factors related to workplace politics and dynamics. These included:

- Issues with their Supervisors or Administrators (76.3%),
- Poor communication (52.6%),
- Inadequate equipment and supplies (50.0%),
- Not feeling valued (47.4%),

- Too much work and not enough time (34.2%), and
- Workplace harassment (34.2%).

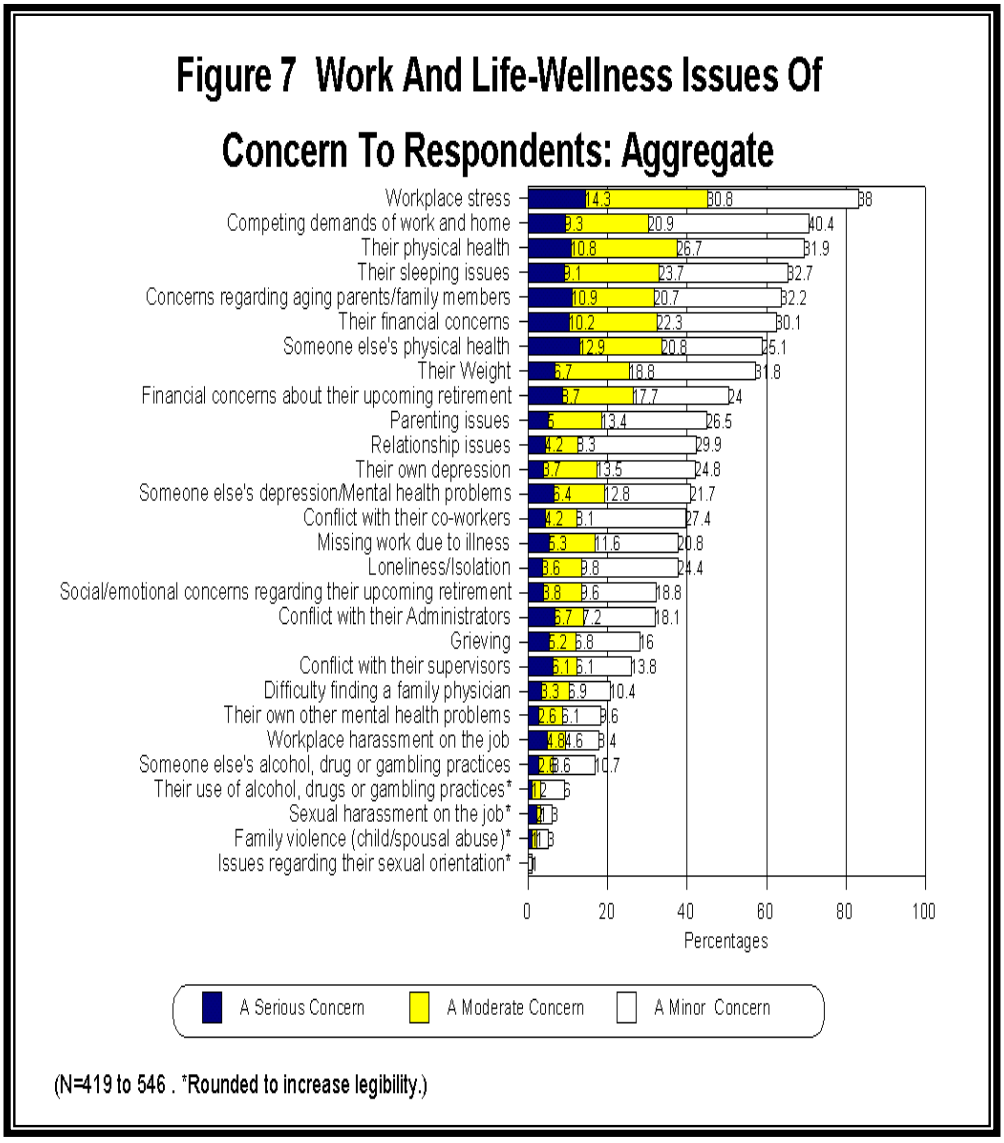
The most frequently identified stress factors reported by respondents in **"Other" occupations** included:

- Too much work and not enough time (46.5%),
- Poor communication (46.5%),
- Unclear role expectations (41.9%),
- Not feeling valued (39.5%), and
- A lack of team collaboration (34.9%).

V) WORK AND LIFE WELLNESS ISSUES REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS:

When respondents were asked to identify their levels of concern regarding a range of work and life wellness issues, the most frequently identified issues included:

- Workplace stress (45.4% reporting this as a serious or moderate concern) (Figure 7),
- Their physical health (37.5%),
- Someone else's physical health (33.7%),
- Their sleeping issues (32.8%),
- Their financial concerns (32.5%),
- Concerns regarding aging parents or other family members (31.6%),
- Competing demands of work and home (30.2%),
- Their weight (27.5%), and
- Financial concerns regarding an upcoming retirement (26.4%).



There were many work and life wellness issues that correlated significantly with respondents' reported levels of workplace stress. These included, but were not limited to:

- Conflict with their Supervisors,
- Conflict with their Co-Workers,
- Competing demands of work and home,
- Concerns about workplace harassment,
- Concerns about their own depression, and/or
- Concerns about feeling lonely or isolated.

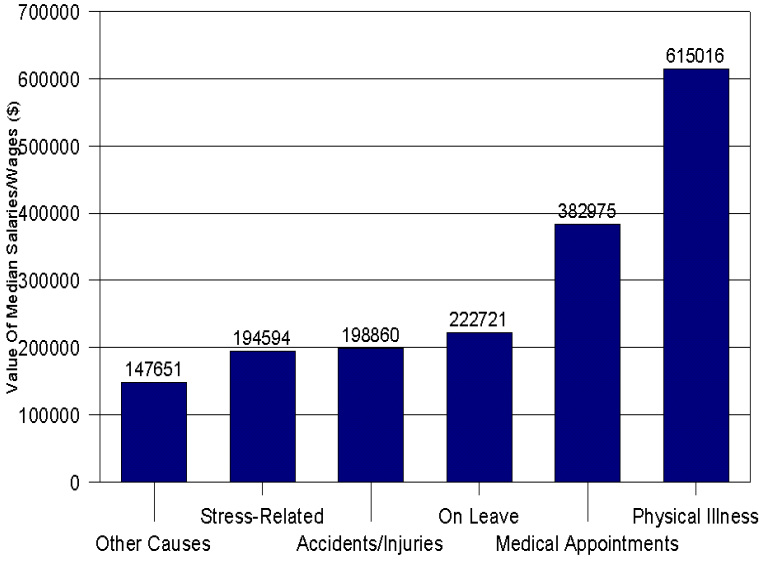
While there was a statistically significant correlation between these factors and the reported levels of negative workplace stress, we cannot determine ***cause and effect*** between these factors, based on the data.

VI) RESPONDENTS' ABSENTEEISM AND PRESENTEEISM:

In the aggregate, respondents missed a total of 6,666 days during the 12 months preceding this study (Figure 8). The majority of these days were missed due to physical illness (2,428 days), followed by medical appointments (1,477 days), time on leave (808 days) and stress related reasons (710 days). Each respondent missed an average of 2.4 days during this time period due to stress.

When reviewing the number of days that respondents attended work when they felt that they should have stayed home (presenteeism), this totalled 6,972 days during this same time period. The largest number of days of presenteeism related to physical illness (2,785 days), followed closely by stress-related issues (2,117 days). On average, each respondent reported that there were 5.9 days when they went to work when they felt they should have stayed home, due to workplace stress.

Figure 8 Total Costs Associated With Respondents' Absenteeism, Due To A Range Of Causes: Aggregate



(N=213, 297, 257, 348, 437, 485. Adjusted to exclude missing data.)

There was a statistically significant correlation between respondents' rates of both absenteeism and presenteeism, and their reported levels of workplace stress.

The total costs associated with respondents' absenteeism, due to all causes, was $615,016.00[2] during the preceding 12 months. The costs associated with absenteeism due to stress, for these respondents, was $194,594.00. These costs do not include the additional costs associated with replacement staff, where applicable.

[2] This figure is based on the median salaries of employees, by occupation, provided by the school division.

VII) IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS TO RESOLVE WORKPLACE STRESS:

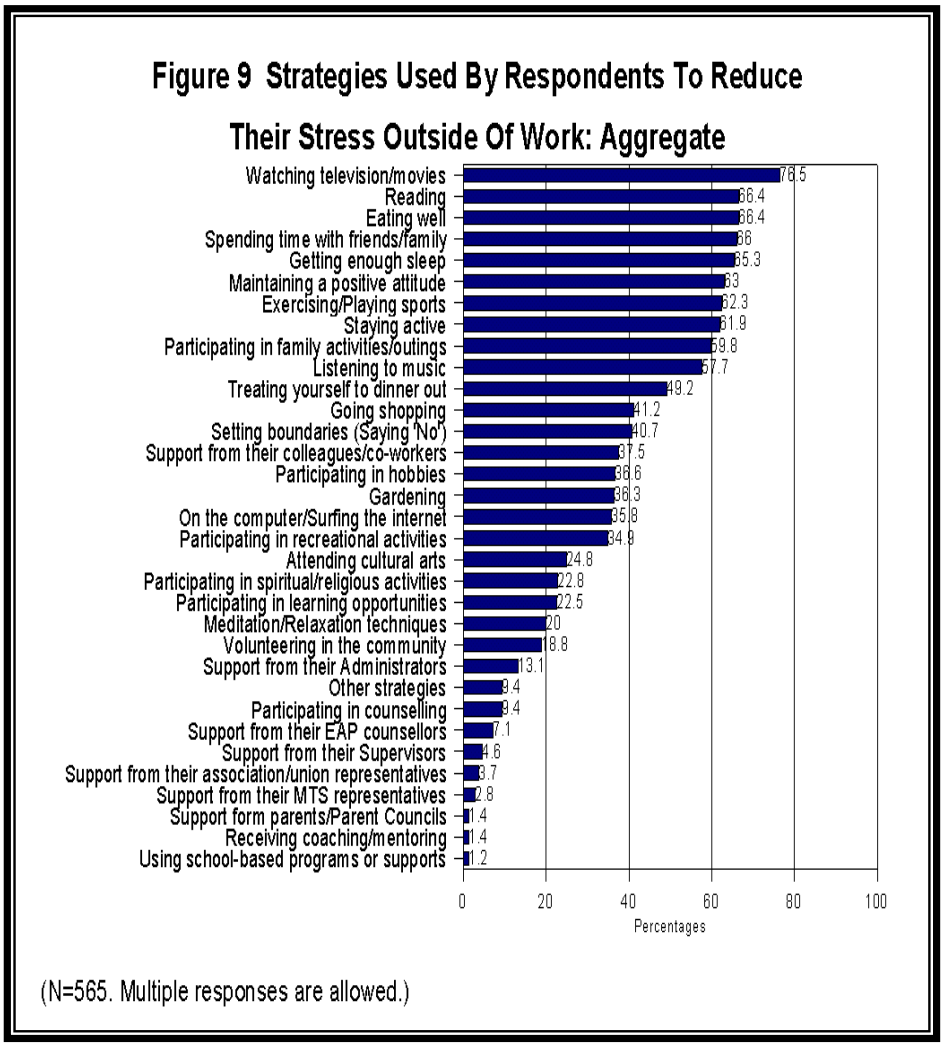
7.1) The Degree To Which Stress Had Been Resolved:

The majority of respondents, who experienced at least some stress, felt they were successful, or very successful, in resolving their stress. This applied to 85.9% of the respondents who experienced workplace stress, and 87.7% of those who experienced stress outside of work. There were significant variations, in this respect, by respondents' occupations, with all Administrators, who experienced stress, feeling that this had been resolved, compared with 61.1% of respondents in the M-C-B Group.

7.2) The Strategies To Resolve Respondents' Stress Outside Of Work:

Respondents, who were able to resolve their own stress, were asked to identify the strategies they had used to accomplish this. The most frequently identified strategies included a mix of physical and social activities, including:

- Watching television or movies (76.5%) (Figure 9),
- Reading (66.4%),
- Eating well (66.4%),
- Spending time with family or friends (66.0%),
- Getting enough sleep (65.3%),
- Maintaining a positive attitude (63.0%),
- Exercising or playing sports (62.3%),
- Staying active (61.9%),
- Participating in family activities or outings (59.8%), and
- Listening to music (57.7%).



There were many significant variations in the selected strategies, based on respondents' occupations, their gender and, to a lesser degree, their ages.

7.3) The Strategies Used To Resolve Respondents' Own Workplace Stress:

As a follow-up to the preceding question, respondents were asked to identify the strategies they used to resolve their workplace stress. Once again, the most frequently identified approaches included looking after the physical, emotional and social aspects of their lives. These included:

- Exercising and staying healthy (64.1%) (Figure 10),

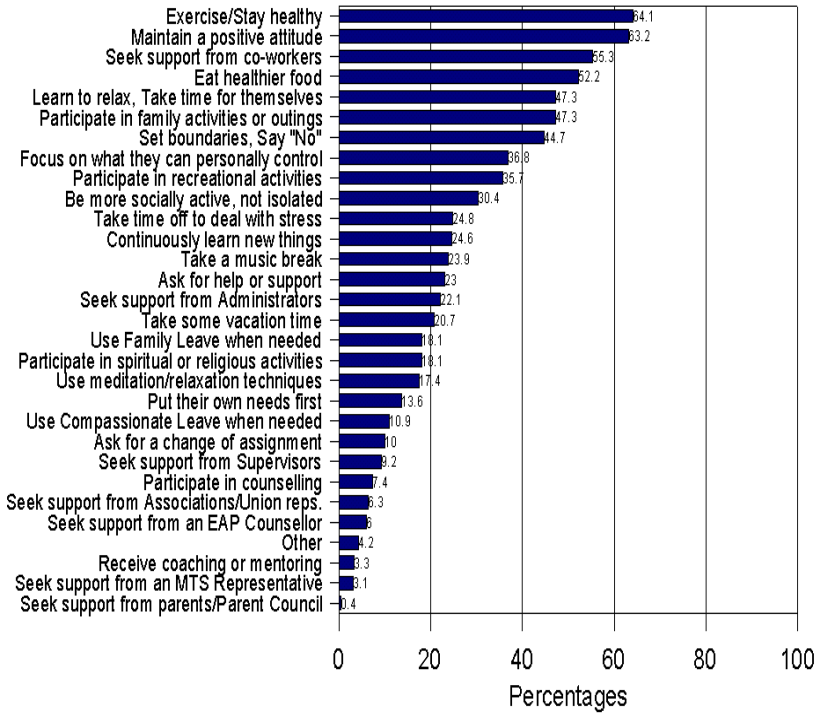
- Maintaining a positive attitude (63.2%),
- Seeking support from their co-workers (55.3%),
- Eating healthier food (52.2%),
- Learning to relax and take time for themselves (47.3%),
- Participating in family activities and outings (47.3%),
- Setting boundaries and learning to say 'No' (44.7%),
- Focusing on what they can personally control (36.8%), and
- Participating in recreational activities (35.7%).

There were again many suggested strategies that varied significantly based on respondents' occupations, gender, and ages.

7.4) Organizational Changes To Reduce Stress Within The School Division:

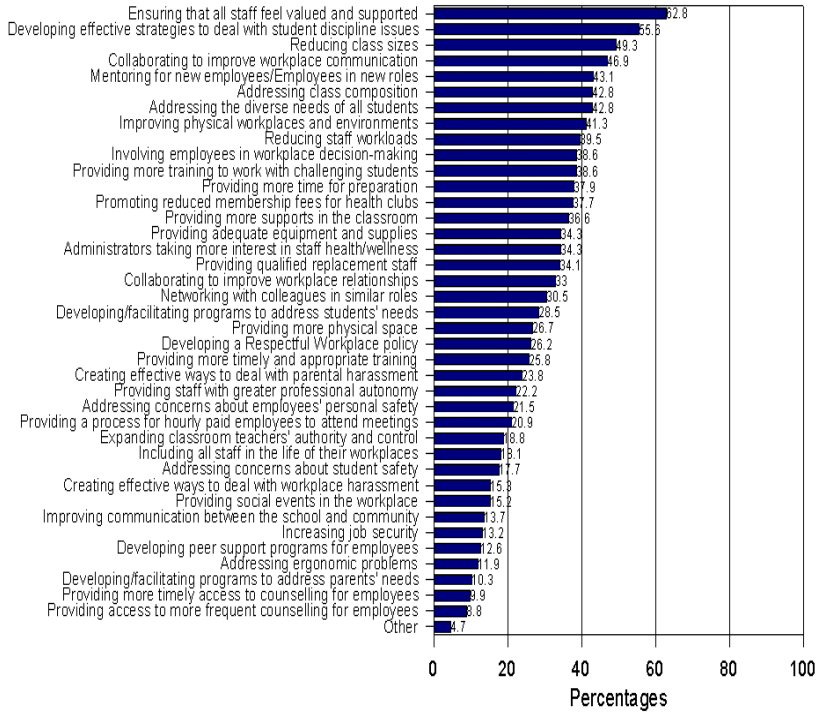
The final question in this series asked respondents to identify the organizational changes they felt would reduce stress within the school division. The most frequently identified suggestions related to resolving workplace wellness issues, stress factors related to working with students with special needs, workload issues, and the physical workspace. These included, in the aggregate:

Figure 10 Strategies Used By Respondents To Reduce Their Workplace Stress: Aggregate



(N=552. Multiple responses are allowed.)

Figure 11 Organizational Changes To Reduce Negative Stress Within The School Division: Aggregate



(N=554. Multiple responses are allowed.)

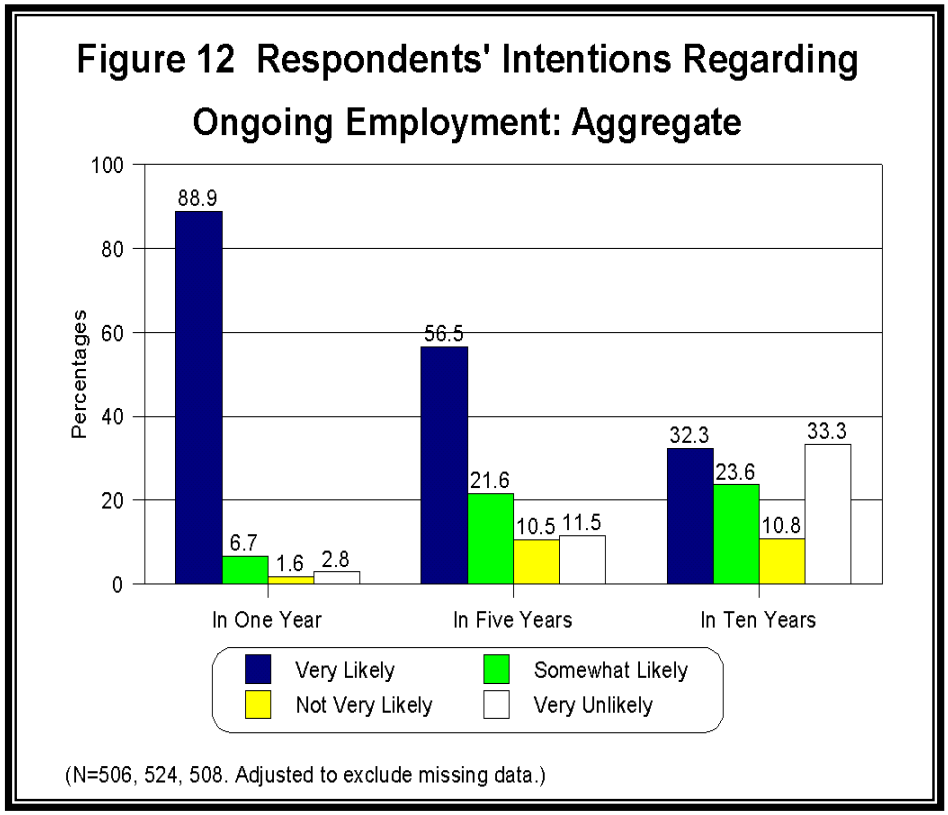
- Ensuring that all staff feel valued and supported (62.8%) (Figure 11),
- Developing effective strategies to deal with student discipline issues (55.6%),
- Reducing class sizes (49.3%),
- Collaborating to improve workplace communication (46.9%),
- Providing mentors for new employees, or employees in new roles (43.1%),
- Addressing class composition (42.8%),
- Addressing the diverse needs of all students (42.8%),
- Improving the physical workspace and work environments (41.3%),
- Reducing staff workloads (39.5%),
- Involving employees in workplace decision-making (38.6%),
- Providing more training to work with challenging students (38.6%),
- Providing more time for preparation (37.9%), and
- Providing more supports in the classroom (36.6%).

Consistent with the preceding sections, desired organizational changes often varied significantly depending upon respondents' occupations, and by their gender and ages.

VIII) FUTURE EMPLOYMENT INTENTIONS WITH THE SCHOOL DIVISION:

8.1) Respondents' Future Employment Intentions:

Virtually all respondents (95.6%) felt they were at least somewhat likely to be working within the school division one year from the study's administration (Figure 12). This also applied to 78.1% of all respondents regarding their five-year employment intentions. Approximately half of all respondents (56.5%) felt they were at least somewhat likely to still be working within the school division ten years in the future.



As anticipated, these projections varied significantly by respondents' ages. Respondents under thirty-five years of age, and even those from thirty-five to fifty years of age, were generally at least somewhat likely to be working in the school division in five years' time (91.7% and 92.5%, respectively). This is contrasted by responses from the respondents fifty-one years of age and over, of whom 52.6% reported these intentions.

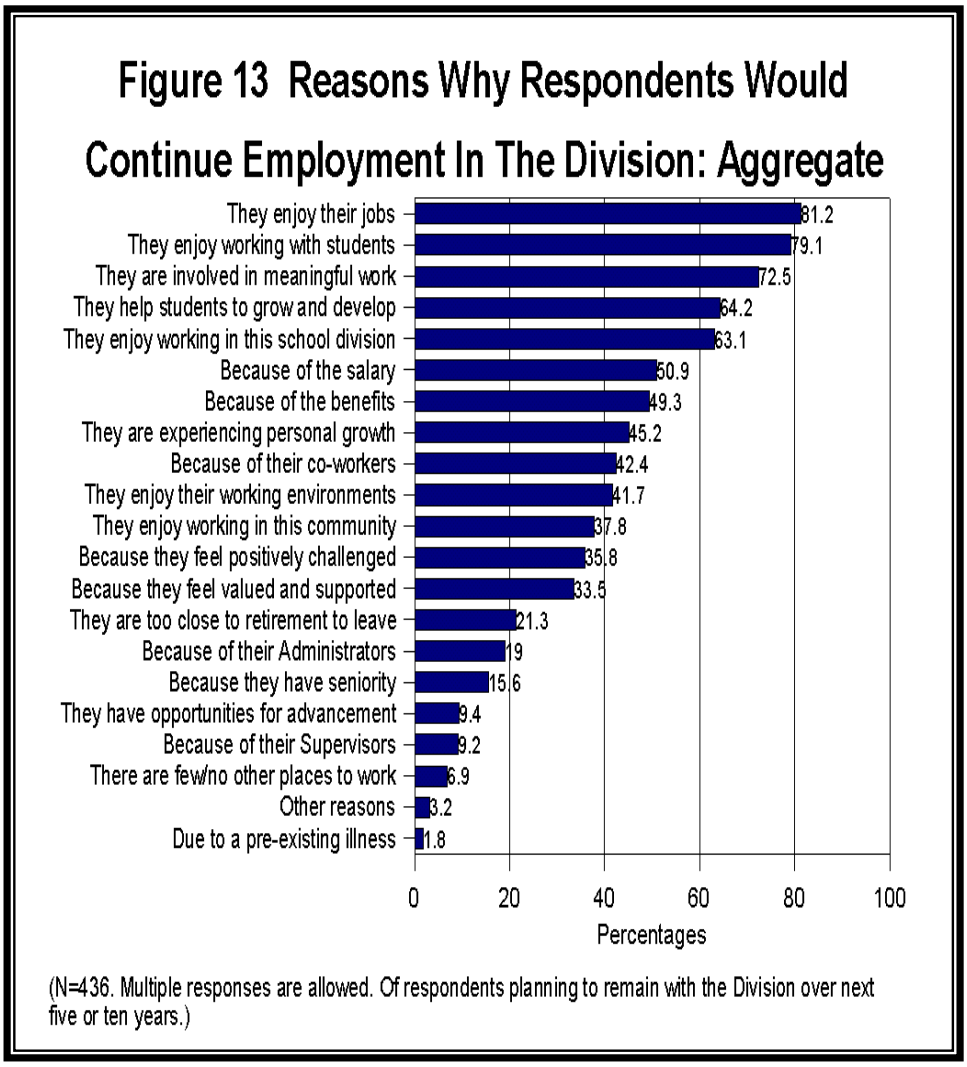
Not surprisingly, when it came to respondents' ten-year employment intentions, 79.2% of those under thirty-five years of age were at least somewhat likely to be working within the division at that time, compared with 72.6% of those from thirty-five to fifty years of age, but only 14.7% of those fifty-one years of age and over.

There were statistically significant variations in respondents' five-year employment intentions, based on their occupations. However, this did not apply to their ten-year employment intentions. Respondents' five-year employment intentions did ***not*** vary significantly based on the amount of negative workplace stress they reported.

8.2) Reasons For Respondents To Remain With The School Division:

The most frequent reasons for respondents to want to continue working for the Seven Oaks School Division, over the next five or ten years, (Figure 13) included:

- Because they enjoy their jobs (81.2%),
- Because they enjoy working with students (79.1%),
- Because they are involved in meaningful work (72.5%),
- Because they help students to grow and develop (64.2%),
- Because they enjoy working within Seven Oaks School Division (63.1%),
- Because of the salaries they earn (50.9%), and/or
- Because of the benefits they receive (49.3%).



There were some significant variations in their responses, based on respondents' occupations.

The most frequent reasons for **Teachers** to remain with the school division included:

- Because they enjoy working with students (87.7%),
- Because they enjoy their jobs (80.0%),
- Because they are involved in meaningful work (76.9%),
- Because they help students to grow and develop (73.5%),

- Because they enjoy working in this school division (62.3%), and/or
- Because they are experiencing personal growth (51.2%).

The most frequent reasons for **Principals and Vice-Principals** to want to continue to work within this school division included:

- Because they enjoy their jobs (100%),
- Because they are involved in meaningful work (100%),
- Because they enjoy working with students (90.0%),
- Because they help students to grow and develop (90.0%),
- Because they enjoy working in this school division (90.0%),
- Because they are experiencing personal growth (80.0%),
- Because they enjoy working in this community (70.0%),
- Because they feel positively challenged (60.0%), and/or
- Because they feel valued and supported (60.0%).

The most frequent reasons for **Clerical staff** to want to continue to work in the school division included:

- Because they enjoy their jobs (90.5%),
- Because of the benefits (76.2%),
- Because they enjoy working in this school division (66.7%), and/or
- Because of the salary (61.9%).

The most frequent reasons for the **Paraprofessionals** to want to continue to work in this school division included:

- Because they enjoy their jobs (90.5%),
- Because they enjoy working with students (90.5%),
- Because they are involved in meaningful work (73.0%),
- Because they help students to grow and develop (73.0%),
- Because they enjoy working in this school division (66.2%),
- Because of the salary (58.1%), and/or
- Because of the benefits (52.7%).

The reasons that respondents in the **M-C-B Group** most often provided for why they wanted to continue working in the school division included:

- Because of the salary (81.8%),
- Because of the benefits (66.7%),
- Because they enjoy their jobs (57.6%), and/or
- Because they enjoy working in this school division (51.5%).

There were seven frequently provided reasons for respondents in **Other positions** to plan to continue their employment with the school division. These included:

- Because they enjoy their jobs (84.4%),

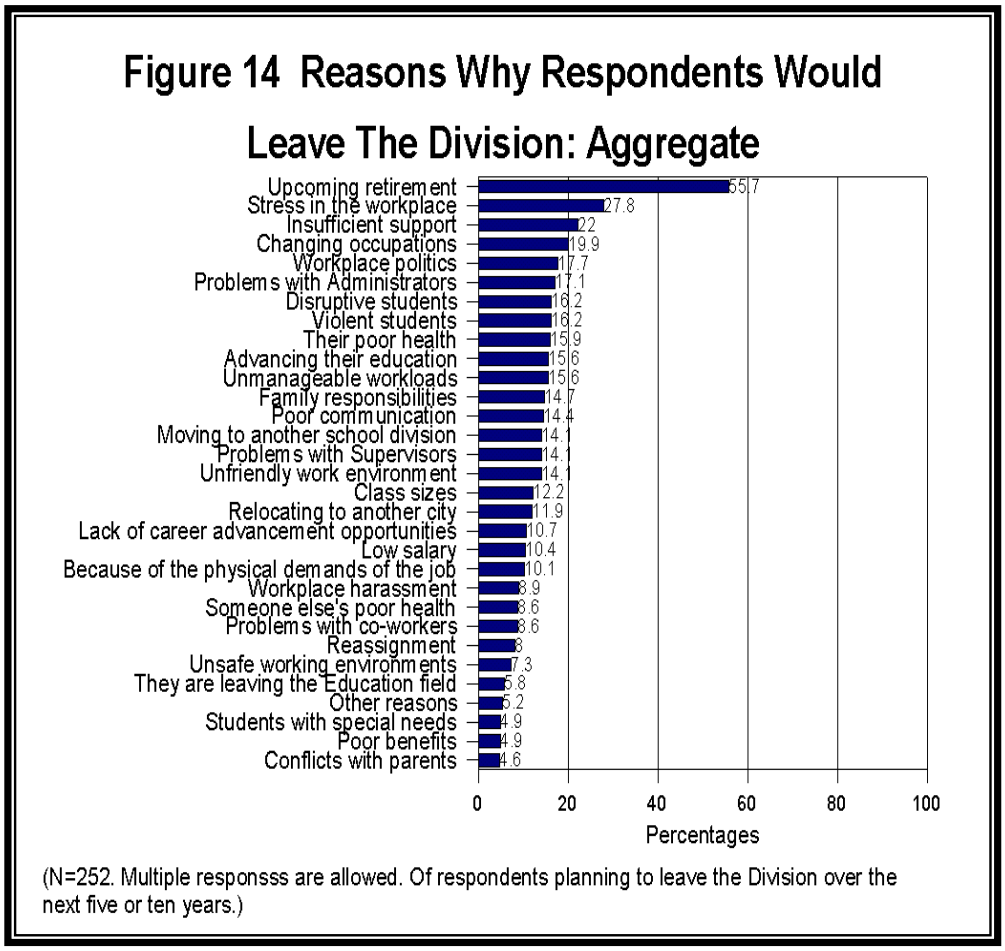
- Because they are involved in meaningful work (81.3%),
- Because they enjoy working with students (62.5%),
- Because they enjoy working in this school division (65.6%), and/or
- Because of the benefits (65.6%).

Relatively few of these reasons to stay with the school division varied significantly by respondents' ages or gender.

8.3) Reasons For Respondents To Leave The School Division:

In the aggregate, there was only one prominent reason, and two notable reasons, for respondents to leave the school division over the next five to ten years (Figure 14):

- An upcoming retirement (55.7%),
- Stress in the workplace (27.8%), and/or
- Insufficient support (22.0%).



All other reasons for leaving the school division were put forward by 4.6% to 19.9% of the respondents who were unlikely to continue to work in the school division over the next 5 to 10 years. In six cases, reasons for leaving the school division varied by respondents' occupations:

- Upcoming retirements (most frequently noted by the Administrators),
- Class sizes (most often noted by Teachers),
- Violent students (most often noted by Paraprofessionals),
- Their own health concerns (most often noted by respondents in the M-C-B Group and the Paraprofessionals),
- Problems with Supervisors (most often noted by respondents in the M-C-B Group), and
- Workplace harassment (most often noted by respondents in the M-C-B Group).

It was not surprising that the percentage of respondents who planned to leave the school division due to an upcoming retirement increased with age. This applied to none of the respondents under

thirty-five years of age, 38.9% of those from thirty-five to fifty years of age, and 88.2% of those fifty-one years of age and over.

PART TWO: THE RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP PROCESSES

I) BACKGROUND:

In order to better analyze the findings of the wellness questionnaire, the Steering Committee requested that five employee focus groups be facilitated by the Researchers. This included Administrators, Teachers, Paraprofessionals, the M-C-B group, and employees under thirty-five years of age.

Thirty-eight employees participated in these focus groups, which were facilitated over three days in November 2008. This chapter provides the highlights of these focus groups. The employees were selected by the Researchers from lists provided by the school division, through its unions and associations. Every effort has been made to protect the identity of individual employees. Toward this end, the Steering Committee was presented with a draft of the report containing the results of the focus group, and were was asked to identify passages or sections that specifically identify individuals.

II) A SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS:

2.1) The Administrators' Focus Group:

2.1.1) Why Administrators Appeared More Satisfied Than Other Employees:

This focus group began by trying to understand why Administrators, in many cases, were more satisfied than other employees in this quantitative aspect of the study. All of the participants in this focus group started out as Teachers themselves. They felt that they were identified as potential administrators early on, and groomed for administration, because of their abilities in the classroom. For example:

- They had a positive attitude toward learners in the classroom,
- They had developed the skills needed to engage the learners,
- They were less stressed about teaching to the curriculum, and
- They put the students ahead of the curriculum.

The Administrators felt that the "skills they had in the classroom are the skills that are effective when dealing with disruptive students. "We engage students, we know the students, we value the students, we form relationships with the students." They also felt that their life experiences led them to be resilient and happy.

The Administrators dedicated a large portion of their two-hour session discussing their ideas to increase the wellness of Teachers, Paraprofessionals, and Custodians, Maintenance staff, and Bus Drivers.

2.1.2) Administrators' Concerns Regarding Divisional Supervisors:

The Administrators shared their concerns regarding the Supervisors of the Custodians, Maintenance staff, and Bus Drivers. There was a general feeling that the Supervisors did not have the supervisory skills needed for these responsibilities, nor did they believe that the Supervisors had taken any supervisory courses. The major points from this discussion included:

- The observation that the Supervisors "marginalize their employees,"
- The observation that the Supervisors are "very hard on their staff,"
- The observation that there is an "adversarial relationship" between Supervisors and their staff,

- The observation that the Administrators also "experience stress when dealing with the Supervisors," and
- The observation that Administrators have been "black-listed" by Supervisors for asking why repairs or servicing is "taking so long."

2.2) The Teachers' Focus Group:

There were five primary themes that emerged from the Teachers' focus group:

- Working with special needs students,
- Dealing with their heavy workload,
- Not always feeling valued for the work they perform,
- Issues regarding sick days and personal leaves, and
- Issues regarding the use of substitute Teachers.

2.2.1) Working With Students With Special Needs:

While the Teachers in this focus group shared their concerns regarding working with students with special needs, they prefaced these remarks by stating their support for the inclusion of these students in their classrooms. Their issues were with the lack of supports in the classroom that are available to them and to these students. As one Teacher noted, "you have to paint a child in a very bad light to get help." Acknowledging the presence of Paraprofessionals in the classroom, it was noted that they "are not being used to full advantage" as supports. It was also noted that the Paraprofessionals would be more of a support if they had more access to specialized training. The Teachers felt that some of these students were using their time at school in unproductive ways. This included a student who "watched videos all day because we can't help him." Teachers reported that there was currently "no program in the division to handle students who can't function in the classroom." Parents of children with special needs were also identified as a stress factor, in that they are requesting services and supports that do not currently exist for their children.

Teachers also wanted more information about students with special needs early in the school year, or at the end of the preceding school year. "We aren't told about [their] issues before the year starts. We learn bits and pieces as the year goes by."

2.2.2) Dealing With Their Heavy Workloads:

Several causes of heavy workloads were identified by the Teachers in this focus group:

- Sitting on an increasing number of committees,
- Maintaining a journal at school, and
- Time required planning for and carrying out Parent-Teacher meetings.

Several means had been developed over the years to help mitigate the effects of heavy workloads at school. This included the advent of a Book Club and the Curling League. However, these Teachers felt that their responsibilities were impeding their ability to participate in either activity. In terms of the Curling Club, it was noted that the league operates one day per week, and that meetings are now also scheduled on that day. In the past there was apparently an understanding that the day in question would not be used for meetings or other extra-curricular activities.

2.2.3) Not Always Feeling Valued For The Work They Perform:

Teachers, like other employees, felt that they were not always recognized or valued for the extra-curricular activities they perform. However, they did feel, in general, that students and parents valued their contributions, but that this was less forthcoming from their Administrators. There was

also the view that Administrators may not be fully aware of the activities they undertake outside the classroom. “We don’t even get a pat on the back from the Administration.”

Not all of the Teachers in this group felt unappreciated by their Administrators. One Teacher commented that “one of my Administrators used to take the time to write thank you notes for extra things that Teachers do. That was nice.”

2.2.4) Issues Regarding Sick Days And Personal Leaves:

Some of the Teachers in this focus group took exception to the practice of having to meet with their Administrators when they had amassed 10 to 12 absences in a year. They felt that this was “punitive.” One Teacher noted feeling “uncomfortable talking about my health with my Administrator and him asking personal questions.” Another Teacher acknowledged that the reason for this meeting may be positively motivated in that “it’s supposed to be presented as ‘caring’ to ask if you’re doing okay.” The perceived appropriateness of this meeting tended to depend upon the relationship the Teacher had with the Administrator: “If you don’t have a good relationship with your Principal, then it comes across wrong. It makes me feel uncomfortable.”

Stress Leave was a major area of discussion. The Teachers felt that “students were given more support to address their feelings of stress than [they] are.” The Teachers felt that employees who take stress leave are stigmatized, with the perception that staff take advantage of stress leaves and “misuse them.” It was also felt that the Teachers themselves may feel that taking a leave to deal with their workplace stress is a sign of weakness, a form of “admitting defeat.” “Teachers don’t want to admit that they need help.” Negative attitudes toward mental health problems, from within and outside the Teaching profession, was a concern for several of these Teachers. “What are we teaching the students if we keep going [to work] when we really shouldn’t?”

2.2.5) Issues Regarding The Use Of Substitute Teachers.

Some of the Teachers noted that a factor that discourages them from taking stress leave is the “difficulty finding appropriate substitute Teachers.” It can also be difficult to find the time to properly prepare for a substitute Teacher to take over their teaching responsibilities.

There was the perception that there is a lack of “qualified substitutes” available to the Teachers to select. This was important because “…when you’re away [sick] you need to not worry about the class.” However, some Teachers noted that having access to any substitute Teachers is a benefit to them. “There are many occupations where no one replaces you when you get sick. Your work doesn’t get done. When I’m not well, I get a sub, they teach my class, and I still get paid.”

The Teachers in this group would prefer being able to select their own substitute Teachers to a greater extent. They also wanted a pool of more qualified substitutes from which to choose. They also believed that the substitute Teachers should be more rigorously evaluated. This would include Administrators spending time in the classroom to monitor the performance of the substitute Teachers.

2.3) The Paraprofessionals’ Focus Group:

Four themes emerged during the Paraprofessionals’ focus group:

- Not feeling valued in the workplace,
- Being the targets for violence in the workplace,
- The qualifications Paraprofessionals should have upon entry, and
- Issues regarding workplace dynamics.

2.3.1) Not Feeling Valued In The Workplace:

The Paraprofessionals in this focus group felt they were not valued in the workplace. This related to their treatment by both Teachers and, to a lesser degree, the Administrators. This discussion was divided into four themes:

- Feeling unwelcome in the workplace,
- Their relationships with the Teachers,
- Being excluded from opportunities for professional development, and
- The 'Paraprofessional' job title.

Feeling Unwelcome In The Workplace:

These Paraprofessionals felt very "marginalized" and "unvalued" in the workplace. However, levels of acceptance appeared to be contingent on the attitudes and approach of the Teachers with whom they work: "Some Teachers are very accepting of our help, some are very closed and demeaning." The treatment that many Paraprofessionals indicated, both through the questionnaire and the focus group, leads them to feel that they are not viewed as a valuable part of a team, working with the Teachers. "We are 'just' the Paraprofessionals. We are all working toward the same goal with the students, and should be considered part of the team." Several examples were provided to illustrate this point:

- One Administrator had to instruct staff that Paraprofessionals need to be respected. "This should be understood."
- New Teachers being introduced to "everyone except for the Paraprofessionals. We aren't even introduced to the new Paraprofessionals." "It's a little thing to introduce and welcome new people."
- Feelings that Teachers are cliquish and exclusionary. At lunchtime "the Paraprofessionals, new Teachers and substitute Teachers congregate because the Teachers don't want to let new people in."

Paraprofessionals' Relationships With The Teachers:

Paraprofessionals' relationships with the Teachers with whom they work was an area of concern for these individuals. There were questions regarding whether Teachers understood the role of the Paraprofessional in the classroom. This sentiment is congruent with the comment from the Teachers that the Paraprofessionals were not being used to full advantage. If Teachers are not aware of their role, it is not surprising that Paraprofessionals would be under-utilized, or misused in the classroom. Several examples of the inappropriate use of Paraprofessionals were provided by these individuals:

- "Older Teachers don't know what to do with us. They are set in their ways and don't want anyone in their class. Younger Teachers want to establish themselves without help from someone with more years' of experience."
- "My job is to advocate for the student in partnership with the Teacher, but that doesn't always happen."
- "The Teacher was photocopying and left [the Paraprofessionals] with the class. They take a break and leave us in charge. Sometimes we're alone with the kids for half an hour. This is a very common occurrence."

The negative relationships with the Teachers have caused some Paraprofessionals to leave the profession. "Some Paraprofessionals have left the profession because they try to do what's best for the kids, but they are told to stop talking and giving opinions, and that their input isn't welcome."

When Paraprofessionals have tried to resolve conflicts with the Teachers this has resulted in a negative outcome. "If you try to talk to someone about a problem with a Teacher you become a snitch, a workplace rat." This creates a negative situation for the Paraprofessional who tried to bring about change, not just with that Teacher, but others as well. "Teachers have a code; not to talk about one another with an outsider. They have blind support for each other." The repercussions faced by the Paraprofessional who tries to seek mediation regarding a problem can be extensive:

- "I went to an Administrator once, and he spoke to the Teacher about a problem. The Teacher never spoke to me again. It creates bad blood, but it doesn't resolve the issue."

Being Excluded From Opportunities For Professional Development:

Another way that Paraprofessionals felt unwelcome in the workplace was due to being excluded from professional development directly related to their day-to-day responsibilities. Given that Paraprofessionals see themselves as members of a team dedicated to assisting students requiring additional support, the fact that Paraprofessionals receive "inequity in training opportunities" adds to their feelings of being undervalued and unappreciated. Three related examples were provided by these Paraprofessionals:

- "During one professional development day on math, the Paraprofessionals [who attended this session] were asked 'What are you doing here? Can we get you some clerical work to do to keep you busy?'"
- "On one professional development day I was asked to clean microwaves and do other cleaning. The rest of the staff was in a workshop. I felt very undervalued."
- "The Teachers went to an Autism workshop but the Paraprofessionals were not invited. We work with the same kids. When we asked to go, we were told there was no money for us to attend."

Some Paraprofessionals noted that their ability to attend professional development opportunities can vary based on the schools in which they work. The lack of consistency was one more source of frustration for these individuals.

The 'Paraprofessional' Job Title:

It was suggested by the Administrators, during their focus group, that the job title for the Paraprofessionals should be changed to *Educational Assistants*, in line with many other school divisions. This idea was shared with the Paraprofessionals who reacted positively to it. They felt that the EA job title is more widely recognized and understood than the current job title, which, in turn, is more "generic" in nature. (However, it should be noted that the Paraprofessionals originally selected this job title themselves.

2.3.2) Paraprofessionals Being The Targets For Violence In The Workplace:

The paraprofessionals in this focus group described instances in which they have been the targets of violence and other forms of abuse in the workplace. As the Administrators noted during their focus group, "Paraprofessionals are often the first on the scene of most student conflicts."

The Paraprofessionals felt that violence against them was more tolerated than student-to-student violence, or violence against other school employees. Several comments illustrated this point:

- "Things that are not tolerated toward students or Teachers are tolerated toward Para-professionals. We are expected to suck it up."
- "If a student punches us, that student is told it isn't nice and don't do it again. If the same student punches a Teacher, he is sent home. There seems to be a feeling that it is part of the Paraprofessional's job to take that. The respect for Paraprofessionals is not there."

- "Kids feel comfortable abusing us because Administrators…put down Paraprofessionals in front of the kids. [Administrators] show no support for us, so kids feel they can disrespect us also."

2.3.3) Qualifications That The Paraprofessionals Should Possess:

The individuals in this focus group supported the notion of minimum qualifications for new Paraprofessionals. One suggestion was for all new Paraprofessionals to possess an Educational Assistant Diploma, which is a thirty-credit course that can take up to five years to complete. As an alternative to this approach, existing Paraprofessionals could be encouraged and supported to enter and complete this course.

Specific topics that these Paraprofessionals felt should be made available to them included working with autistic students, challenging students, and students with specific behavioural problems.

2.3.4) Paraprofessionals' Experiences With Workplace Dynamics:

Some Paraprofessionals report to more than one Supervisor. This could include the classroom Teacher and a Resource Teacher, or two classroom Teachers in the case of a Paraprofessional who works in more than one classroom. This was seen as a source of stress and confusion for some of the Paraprofessionals. As one Paraprofessional noted, we are "assigned to the Teacher, not to the kids. We are there [in the classroom] because the funded kid is there, but we are assigned to the classroom."

2.4) The Custodians, Maintenance Staff And Bus Drivers' Focus Group:[3]

Four themes also emerged through the focus group with the Maintenance staff, Custodians and the Bus Drivers (the M-C-B Group):

- Negative experiences with their Supervisors,
- Their positive perceptions of some employees,
- Concerns regarding bus safety, and
- Perceived barriers to change.

2.4.1) Participants' Negative Experiences With Their Supervisors:

By far the largest portion of this focus group was taken up by participants' concerns about their relationships with their Supervisors. This was divided into three themes:

- Perceptions of the supervisors' negative attitudes,
- Perceptions that the Supervisors had inconsistent expectations and treated their employees inconsistently, and
- Supervisors' perceived control issues.

Some of the comments provided by these participants were corroborated by the Administrators, through their focus group.

Supervisors' Negative Attitudes:

Participants in this focus group described numerous instances in which they felt that they were treated negatively by their Supervisors. This is consistent with their responses through the

[3] The participants in this focus group provided many detailed examples regarding their relationships with their Supervisors. Given the need to protect the confidentiality of this research process, and the anonymity of the small number of Supervisors in question, the identifying examples have been removed from this part of the Highlights Report. However, the related verbatim quotes have been provided to the Superintendent.

Wellness Questionnaire. Participants felt that their Supervisors were unduly negative and critical of them and their colleagues, that they treated them in an insulting manner, and were judgmental. It was also reported that some employees have resigned their positions due to the negative treatment they received from their Supervisors. Finally, these participants reported that attempts to mitigate their relationships with their Supervisors have led to negative ramifications for those who tried.

Supervisors' Inconsistent And Arbitrary Treatment Of Employees:

When it came to the inconsistency of the Supervisors, participants noted that it was difficult predicting and anticipating their Supervisors' actions. Other participants provided examples of the differential treatment of employees by the Supervisors.

Supervisors' Perceived Control:

These participants also felt that the Supervisors maintained undo control over aspects of their jobs. This was a point-of-view shared through the Administrators focus group as well. In addition, it was the experience of the Researchers that one Supervisor overruled the Superintendent, who had said that all staff participating in the focus groups would be replaced at work for the full two-hour session. Instead, two participants said that the Supervisor told them they would have to leave the focus group at the one-hour mark.

2.4.2) Participants Had Positive Impressions Of Other Staff:

While these participants clearly had negative impressions about their Supervisors, they had equally positive impressions about other employees in their workplaces. Several of these participants had had a very positive relationship with a former Supervisor. These participants were also able to provide a range of examples of their positive relationships with their Administrators, Teachers, and other school staff:

- "My Principal…did something for [the employees] to show that he appreciated us. It was greatly appreciated."
- "The people I work with at school are great. I help them out, [and] they treat me great."
- "There is a great attitude at school. [One day] fifteen Teachers helped us put chairs away after an assembly."
- "The Principals and Vice-Principals also take crap from [some of the Supervisors], so they are more sympathetic."

2.4.3) Bus Drivers' Concerns Regarding Bus Safety:

School Bus Drivers in this focus group shared their concerns regarding safety on the buses. This primarily related to the need for protocol regarding "altercations on the buses." As one individual stated:

- "What is the justification for turning the bus around? What kind of behaviour is considered serious and unacceptable behaviour? What do [Bus Drivers] do in those situations? At what point is it unsafe for a Bus Driver to drive, when you know there is a situation?"

They felt that there were currently no standards or policies for Bus Drivers when a potentially dangerous or distracting situation arises on their buses. Part of the problem relates to the bullying that they witness on the bus, and the fact that there is no buffer between them and the altercation. Participants felt that this could lead to potentially dangerous driving conditions.

These participants were also concerned about not being provided with information regarding students who were involved in altercations during the school day, who will then be riding on their buses immediately thereafter.

- "It would be nice to know if any of the students were in an altercation during the day, so we could watch for some continuation on the bus. [However], if a kid has had an altercation at

school, they are allowed on the bus. They are isolated in the school all day to control them, [and] then they are put on the bus. After a day like that, the parents should be called to transport them home."

The participants were also feeling the need for directives regarding their ability to intervene to control negative and dangerous behaviour on the school buses. "If there is a fight on the bus, I'm supposed to stay out of it."

While some Administrators have acknowledged the dangers that Bus Drivers sometimes experience, these participants also noted there can be a tendency to minimize these dangers.

- "There was a fight on the bus, and it should have been documented, but the Supervisor said that it was 'buddy fighting,' and nothing was done."
- "If I had the support of my boss and he backed me up, it would make a difference. It would be great. But he'll look into things and then dismiss them."

2.4.4) Perceived Barriers To Change:

Several of these participants were not optimistic that change was possible. They felt that the root problems regarding their relationships needed to be addressed before any meaningful change could take place. They believed that the Supervisors had "no motivation to change." A second individual noted that previous changes in Supervisors' behaviour was superficial:

- "When a problem with one person is solved… [Supervisors] just pick on someone else."

There was also concern raised regarding the retribution that employees, who try to bring about change, may experience. "If we go to [the Superintendent] to talk about our problems, there are repercussions from our Supervisors."

2.5) The Focus Group With Employees Under Thirty-Five Years Of Age:

This focus group was comprised of participants from almost all employee groups. There were five themes that emerged from this group process.

- Stress factors reported by newer employees,
- The impact of age on workplace dynamics,
- Stress relief and wellness reported by newer employees,
- The inability of formal training to prepare newer employees for the realities of the workplace, and
- Career expectations of newer employees.

2.5.1) Stress Factors Reported By Newer Employees:

An important aspect of the stress experienced by newer Teachers related to the differences between what they anticipated from the job, and the realities they experience once they are in the workplace. A second, but equally important stress factor related to their "insecurities."

- "I thought the job would involve instilling great ideas and changing the world. Then you realize you can't do that today, maybe tomorrow. It's kind of depressing."
- "Another first year Teacher said to me, 'if I knew how it was going to be, I would never have become a Teacher.' Many don't have a good first year."
- "We want the position to be challenging, so we tend to take on a lot. We need to find the balance between challenging ourselves, and feeling overworked and stressed."
- "When you're young and just starting your first career, you have lots of ideas and ideals. And then you hit a wall and get disillusioned."

- "When you're younger and criticized, you tend to get worked up by it. When you're older you take it more in stride."

As a result of feeling pressured to take on many job responsibilities, these participants reported difficulty achieving a healthy work and life balance.

- "When you go home you take the job with you. You're always thinking about it."
- "I didn't know how stressful [the job] would be. I didn't know how much I would take home."

Another related stress factor was participants' workloads. This was related to their inability, early in their careers, to say 'no,' or to otherwise set limits for how much work they take on. In addition to extracurricular activities, newer Teachers have the additional pressure of developing teaching plans and the related classroom materials.

- "Younger people are asked to be on committees that older Teachers don't want to do anymore. Sometimes you can't say 'no.' You're pressured to coach or be on a committee. Saying 'no' is not an option."
- "When you're new, you're given courses to teach that are not your major. You have to learn about these subjects and research them."
- "The grade that you're teaching is not important, but you have to be flexible and change. You have to find things related to the subject and look for resources."
- "I am sometimes asked to cover a class for other Teachers during my prep time, even though I have to get ready for Parent-Teacher night… You're trying to prove yourself but it's your free time…"

2.5.2) The Impact Of Age On Workplace Dynamics:

The major driving force for several of these participants was the need to establish their credibility in the workplace, and in their own minds. This related, as well, to the feelings of insecurity that was touched on above.

- "When you're a new Teacher and younger, you aren't taken seriously. Or sometimes, you won't speak up because you are new and not sure what to say."
- "People won't take me seriously because I'm young and they don't think I know anything. This is stressful, keeping it all inside."
- "There is a difference between the younger and older generations. They younger ones have different ideas and are willing to give things a try. The older ones are more experienced and set in their ways. It is difficult for them to change."

Some of these participants felt that older employees take advantage of their younger colleagues:

- "The older [employees] complain, but not to the bosses, because they'll come after you. The older guys try to get the new guys to complain. The older employees have learned to bite their tongues."
- "I was asked to cover for one employee who was sick and then told that [another employee] was also sick, and could I cover for him [as well]? I ended up doing the work of three people with only two hours of overtime. [I received] no thanks [from the Supervisor] though."

2.5.3) Newer Employees Experiencing Stress Relief And Wellness:

These participants were able to identify several ways in which they are able to mitigate or eliminate their own feelings of stress, while increasing their feelings of wellness. For these individuals, the availability of social avenues for stress relief are key.

- "It's important for staff to do some physical stuff. To get together for social time, without talking about students…"

- "On a school Professional Development day we went to ***Harbourview*** and, instead of cutting the day short, we took advantage of the minigolf, paddleboats, golf and socializing. It was great and we got to know each other. It wasn't about teaching, it was about having fun."

Some of these younger employees were also interested in more opportunities for wellness activities. This could include a gym membership, organized sports, and access to weight room facilities.

More than some of the older focus group participants, these participants felt that it was important to be able to use leaves of absence, or counselling services, to help relieve their feelings of stress. However, they did not appear to feel that the school division supports this practice, largely due to the perceived stigma.

- "I've gone for Employee Assistance Program counselling to deal with workplace stress. It was very good. They told me not to say anything [about the counselling] to the Supervisor."
- "I asked the union rep. about taking time because of stress. I was told not to say anything about the stress because I would get grief from my bosses."
- "There is a Personal Leave Day, but you almost feel punished when you take it…"

2.5.4) Perceptions That Formal Education Does Not Prepare Newer Employees For The Realities Of The Workplace:

A recurring theme of this focus group was the perception that newer employees were not fully prepared for the realities facing them at work. This was an important area of concern. The pervasive view among these individuals was that formal education, particularly related to the Teaching field, spends too much time on curriculum, and not enough time preparing them for the job.

- "In university there is lots of theory and not enough practical experience."
- "University does not prepare you. They don't teach you different styles and approaches for different learners."
- "In university the stress is on the curriculum. In the real world, it doesn't have much bearing. You do the best you can depending on the needs and skills of the kids."

Some alternative approaches to teaching, put forward by these participants, included:

- Opportunities for role-playing varied scenarios in the classroom,
- Job-shadowing more experienced employees in the workplace, and
- Access to multi-year formal Mentoring Programs in the workplace.

The concept of the formal Mentoring Program received consistent support from these participants.

- "People with experience can help others" with less experience.
- "The first year on the job is for learning the ropes and breaking into the profession. The second year you have an understanding [of the workplace and your role in it] but you still need to consult on some things."

There was also support for other more informal means of orienting new staff to their jobs and the workplace. This could include providing a map of each workplace, including where to find each staff person, the locations of equipment and supplies, and an initial calendar of events.

2.5.5) Career Expectations Of Newer Employees:

The participants in this focus group provided three observations regarding the career plans and expectations of employees under 35 years of age: Concerns that additional education could have a negative impact on their career options; Why they might want to continue being employed in this school division; and Reasons to leave the school division that have nothing to do with employment.

In terms of the first point, several participants shared the view that too much education could be detrimental to their ability to attain employment with the school division in the future:

- "Sometimes more education is a deterrent. The higher rank of Teacher you are, the more possible it is to price yourself out of a job."
- "I'm nervous to go on with my education in case I won't get hired."

Participants also provided their reasons for wanting to continue to work in this school division, including job security, positive working conditions, and positive relationships with their colleagues and other employees:

- "In my school, people are coming from other divisions because this is known as a good division, a progressive division."
- "Teaching in [a larger] division is very different from [teaching] here. It's like coming to a small town from a big city."
- "I could work somewhere else for more money, but the school division is a secure job, and there are problems in other workplaces too."
- "The biggest motivator to stay is the boss. You need one who is supportive. It's amazing that one person can affect so many people in either a good or a bad way."

Finally, these participants noted that younger employees seek opportunities elsewhere for reasons that have nothing to do with the workplace or their employment experiences. This included their desire for variety and stimulation, relationships that take them away from Winnipeg, and the desire to explore other locations and cultures.

- "Younger Teachers want stimulation. Teaching the same course five times gets tedious. You need something more stimulating. You need change."
- "We come from a generation that says you are expected to change your job seven times in a lifetime. Maybe I should. I don't want to be a Teacher for 30 years and end up bitter in the end."
- "A lot of young people leave Winnipeg for many different reasons. Single people sometimes meet someone and then move away to be with them."
- "Canadian Teachers are well-accepted in other countries. It's easy to get jobs elsewhere, and it is a good adventure."

2.6) Suggested Changes Identified Through The Focus Groups:

Solutions to reducing workplace stress included both suggested changes to the work environment and also changes to the workplace supports and processes. This section summarizes, in table format, the suggested solutions put forward by the various employee focus groups.

Suggestions	Admini-strators	Teachers	Parapro-fessionals	M-C-B Group	Under 35 Years
Provide better supports for students with special needs		✔			
Provide Teachers with better prior information regarding students with special needs who will be in their classrooms		✔			
Ensure that employees feel valued	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Address issues regarding sick days and personal leaves		✔			✔
Alter the process for teachers to identify and access substitute teachers		✔			
Develop and enforce a ***Respectful Workplace Policy***			✔	✔	
Ensure equitable access to Professional Development opportunities			✔		
Address violence experienced by Employees			✔	✔	
Change the *Paraprofessional* job title to *Educational Assistants* (EAs)	✔		✔		
Address the entry qualifications of the paraprofessionals			✔		
Address workplace dynamics experienced by the paraprofessionals: too many supervisors	✔		✔		
Address concerns regarding employees' relationships with their Supervisors	✔			✔	
Ensure that Supervisors have the requisite skills for this position, including the provision or accessing of related training	✔			✔	
Explore the possibility of Administrators supervising the Custodians and Maintenance staff working in their schools	✔			✔	
Develop policy and protocol regarding the roles and responsibilities of School Bus Drivers in the event of conflict on the buses				✔	

Suggestions	Admini-strators	Teachers	Parapro-fessionals	M-C-B Group	Under 35 Years
Ensure that Bus Drivers are informed about students who have had altercations during the school day, who will be riding on their buses				✔	
Ensure that Teachers' formal education prepares new Teachers for the reality of the classroom					✔
Provide student Teachers with opportunities for role-playing, or job shadowing, to better prepare them for the classroom.					✔
Develop a formal ***Mentoring Program*** for new employees	✔				✔
Provide orientations for new employees					✔
Assist employees to develop a healthy work and life balance					✔
Provide employees with opportunities to get together to socialize					✔

PART THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED BY THE DIVISION'S UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

I) INTRODUCTION:

The final section of this report presents recommendations put forward by the Unions and Associations of the Seven Oaks School Division, in response to the findings of this employee wellness research process. The development of these recommendations was facilitated by the members of the Steering Committee related to their respective employee groups. The content of this section largely represents the verbatim material produced as a result of each of these consultations processes.

There were many common factors that arose from these individual consultations. Among these were the need to ensure that all employees feel respected and valued, the need to provide formal mentoring opportunities, the need to welcome and orient all new employees, the need for clear and effective communication, and the need for accessible ongoing training and professional development. Several of these employee groups talked about the need for support and strategies to assist them when dealing with challenging students.

II) THE PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1) Recommendations That Apply To All Employees:

These recommendations were synthesized by the Seven Oaks School Division, through the Steering Committee, and provided for inclusion in this report.

Welcome to the School or Worksite:

All employees benefit from a thoughtful welcome and induction process in a new school or workplace. This welcome process should go beyond the basic orientation and help the new employee to appreciate the character and values of the staff community they are joining and to begin to form relationships with new colleagues. This welcome process should be particular to the individual school or worksite and should involve colleagues as well as administrators and supervisors.

Being Included, Being Acknowledged, and Feeling Valued:

All employees benefit from having their work noticed, from being acknowledged, and from feeling valued. Schools are very busy, very social places but paradoxically most adults work alone. Thoughtful and dedicated work, be that of a teacher, paraprofessional, custodian, secretary, library technician, administrator or bus driver, can go without notice. We must work consciously to ensure that all employees feel that their work is noticed, and valued. In addition all staff should be included in activities such as staff meetings, professional development days, and other staff functions that are critical components to the feeling of belonging to the staff of the school or workplace.

We can attend to the issue of isolation with both formal approaches such as teaming, supervision by walking around, and frequent structured opportunities for acknowledgement and praise. We can also ensure a healthier workplace by attending to social activities and by making celebration of accomplishment and effort a routine occurrence.

All employees benefit from being included in decision making, and by having opportunities to exercise their judgement and initiative in their work.

Valuing and acknowledging employees is something that must be consciously, thought-fully and intentionally planned and imbedded in the workplace culture.

Site-Based Respectful Workplace Program:

The division should initiate a *respectful workplace program* in order to ensure that workplace relationships are healthy, positive, and characterized by respect and positive regard. This initiative should contribute to all employees understanding of issues of diversity and difference. In essence, our collective responsibility is to imagine the workplace community we desire and then make certain that we have the skills and will to contribute to creating that workplace community.

This should be a formal initiative undertaken by the division, developed in concert with all employee groups, and implemented in a way that involves all employees.

Early Identification, Accessible Support:

The division should support employees in maintaining their health and in accessing the support they may need to address health issues early. Care must be taken to ensure that employees understand the benefit to them of early identification of health and wellness issues, and early access to supports. Supports such as EAP, LTD and Extended Health should be well known to all employees.

Health Promotion and Education:

The Division, in cooperation with its employee groups, should facilitate a program of health and wellness education for employees to assist employees in managing their health, dealing with stresses and achieving a positive work/life balance.

New Employees Workshop:

The Division should develop a new employee's workshop for non-teaching employees that provides an orientation to the values, culture and expectations of the Seven Oaks School Division.

Addressing Multiple Competing Demands:

All staff face multiple competing demands. All staff must therefore develop the judgement and be granted the authority to manage their own work to a considerable degree. The division must continue to value its employees, educate their judgement and develop their skills and sense of responsibility to the children and community of Seven Oaks.

Addressing Communication:

A culture of open communication between school administration and staff needs to be fostered. When information is communicated openly staff are better able to provide information to other staff, students, parents and the public and this information also supports all staff in the performance of their duties.

2.2) Recommendations From The Seven Oaks Teachers' Association (SOTA) and The Superintendents' Team

Mentorship For Teachers:

Mentorship, a teacher working with another teacher to develop their teaching practice, is an approach that can benefit both beginning teachers and experienced teachers who wish to strengthen an aspect of their practice. While informal mentorship activities currently occur in the division, there would be benefit to a more formal and available program. Mentorship arrangements can be structured in a variety of ways, and need to be constructed to suit the individuals and situations involved. Mentorship arrangements will benefit from support in the form of structured meeting time, common preparation time, and substitute release.

The division is preparing a document outlining opportunities for structured mentorship and make that document readily available to all teachers.

Supporting Teachers As They Deal With Challenging Students:

Teachers, who work to succeed with children who have challenges, need to understand the range of help and support that is available to them, and need to have ready and timely access to professional development pertaining to special needs students.

The Board SOTA Advisory Committee is currently working to develop initiatives to realize this. The division has put resources in the 2009-2010 budget in support of this initiative to support an ongoing professional development program with follow up support.

Managing Work/Life Balance:

Teachers must manage multiple, competing demands. It is the nature of their work. The Division expects that as teachers work to establish priorities and to set limits that are vital to a healthy work and life balance, they need to understand those aspects of their work that are voluntary and know that it is their responsibility to set limits and to say "No."

Professional Development/Administration Days:

As schools establish their yearly calendar of professional development/administration days, they should consider teacher workload related to assessment and reporting demands. There are ten "non teaching" days in the school year. A minimum of five of those days must be for professional development. Some of the "non teaching" days are fixed by the division - SAG, Divisional In-service, Parent Teacher. The remainder are scheduled at school discretion. Staff should participate in decisions with respect to the school calendar and can have input so that the school calendar is structured to take account of and assist them with workload peaks at such times as reporting periods.

2.3) Recommendations From The Seven Oaks Paraprofessionals' Association:

Preamble:

Through the evaluation findings, it has been determined that many Paraprofessionals enjoy their jobs. However, they also expressed the following concerns:

- The need for more of a focus on respectful workplaces coupled by teaming/inclusion (i.e., Paraprofessionals need to be part of staff meetings),
- The need to be considered in team meetings, and
- The need to be recognized as an important part of the team.

Recommendations:

Mentorship For Paraprofessionals, And Welcoming New Paraprofessionals To The School Division:

We believe we need a *formalized* mentorship program. In addition, new Paraprofessionals need to be oriented to the workplace. New people do not know who to report to, who to ask questions. New employees should get a site-welcoming package. We recommend that:

- All new employees attend orientation workshops.
- Each school site have someone designated to mentor new employees (introduce to other staff, show building, explain supervision procedures etc.).
- Schools create a folder of school pertinent information for new/term Paraprofessionals (like what staff receive at the beginning of the year).
- SOPA to discuss mentorship and the creation of all information folders/booklets for new staff with SOPA school reps.
- All Paraprofessionals should have a sub folder.

Addressing Violence Experienced By Some Paraprofessionals:

Teachers and Paraprofessionals should talk about the stress of negative student behaviour and violence. Four recommendations to address this problem include:

- Ongoing workshops on students' behaviour.
- A divisional day focussing on negative students' behaviour and bullying, like the conference attended by some in Ottawa.
- When students are violent towards Paraprofessionals, that a debriefing of the situation should take place.
- The school team, including the Paraprofessionals, should review behaviour management strategies, where appropriate.

Recognizing Paraprofessionals As Full Members Of The Team:

Paraprofessionals should be recognized and involved as full participating team members in all work sites, as well as being treated as professionals. In addition, the division should implement a **Respectful Workplace Policy** that would, in part, help address the issues that cause paraprofessionals to feel not included. It could also help to address some of the principles of violence against Paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals need to be part of the team and part of team meetings. If the school is doing "class reviews" the Paraprofessionals should be part of the initial meeting at a minimum. Schools should find ways to have staff meetings that include the Paraprofessionals or find ways for them to get staff information. Schools should find ways for the Paraprofessionals and teachers to collaborate.

Paraprofessionals' Training And Qualifications:

The following recommendations were put forward regarding training provided to the Para-professionals.

- Continue the training initiative (for example, courses on inclusion, behaviour etc.).
- Paraprofessionals need to be informed of how to apply for professional development opportunities.
- Paraprofessionals need to be considered when schools are planning professional development.
- The Division should continue to hire adequate and qualified paraprofessionals.
- The Division should recognize and continue to review the number of "failure to fill".

2.4) Recommendations From The School Division's Custodians, Maintenance Employees And Bus Drivers:

Supervision by the Principals:

Custodial employees are part of their school staff and should fall directly under the management of the school principal for their routine supervision. This will support more consistent positive acknowledgement and valuing of custodial staff.

Divisional Operations management will attend to issues of staffing, substitutes, performance coaching, building systems management and training.

Site Based Decision-Making:

The Division should shift decision-making responsibility and budget resources so that custodial supplies and tools become a school-based responsibility. Principals are taking greater responsibility for approval of vacation, emergency leave and the like.

Bus Safety:

Where there is an issue of student discipline that may affect the safety of the bus driver and the students in their charge, the bus driver should be informed. Bus drivers have expressed concern that in instances where there has been conflict between students during the school day, that proper provision should be made to ensure the safety of all on the bus ride home. This will require alternate transportation arrangements or additional supervision.

Positive Leadership and Supervision:

Custodial, maintenance and transportation employees value leadership and supervision that is positive, encouraging and mindful of the challenges they face as they deal with multiple competing demands and changing circumstances.

Employees benefit from understanding. If they are refused a request they are entitled to an explanation.

Employees' dignity should be respected. Praise can be public but correction should be in private, and should be thought of as coaching for improvement.

New Employee Orientation:

All new employees should receive an orientation to a new work site and/or new job responsibilities. As a matter of practice, the division should arrange for a transitional overlap in order for an employee leaving a site or job to orient the employee who is moving to their site or job. Further elaboration regarding this is contained in the 2007 Minutes of Settlement between the Division and CUPE 731.

2.5) Recommendations From The School Division's Clerical Staff:

Communication:

Clerical staff benefit from being informed. They are better able to do their jobs and they experience less stress. Examples of communication particular to Clerical staff is that it would be beneficial for Clerical staff to know information relating to field trips, incidents with students, school activities, information shared at Administrators' meetings or even the Administrator making staff aware that they will be leaving the building.

Professional Development:

The Division has shown a commitment to ongoing professional development for all staff. Specifically related to Clerical staff there should be continuing professional development related to ongoing work with CIMS, other software for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, the website, etc. As well, Clerical staff would like to see professional development relating to improving soft skills in the area of dealing with difficult people, whether in-person or on the phone.

Supports to 949 Members as they Deal with Challenging Students:

Students are left in the office for disciplinary reasons. At times their behaviour can become disruptive and disrespectful. As well, because of the set up of the office and the student's proximity to a secretary's workstation, there may be confidentiality issues. We need to ensure that Clerical staff have access to professional development and training for these students and these types of situations. For the 2009-10 school year, this will be a discussion topic at liaison.

2.6) Recommendations From The Library Technicians:

In the Seven Oaks School Division Employee Wellness Report, Library Technicians are placed within the grouping labelled "Other Occupations" due to the small size of our sub-group. Other job classifications within this group include clinicians, non-union positions, and other occupations.

Due to the nature of work for Library Technicians compared to other classifications within this grouping, it would be difficult for our representatives on the "Wellness Steering Committee" to review the data for "other occupations" and be able to develop "Next Steps and Recommendations" for these employees. Therefore, we were afforded the opportunity to meet with our liaison Superintendent and review the survey results specific to the Library Technician job classification alone. During this meeting, it was clearly understood that the data we were reviewing was strictly confidential.

From that liaison team meeting we were able to determine that the general perceptions of the workplace by Library Technicians is for the most part positive, with most feeling that they are valued and involved in meaningful work.

Responses by Library Technicians to questions about communication and relationships with co-workers and administrators were also positive, and confirmed that the continued efforts to create a team atmosphere in the Division are effective in maintaining a healthy working relationship for our group. It was not surprising to find that there was only one issue rated high in the Library Technician findings, but low in the draft Wellness Report: the "lack of qualified substitutes". We believe the reason for this anomaly is that perhaps some of those included in "other occupations" do not require replacement staff. If true, the results would be skewed. The issue of qualified substitutes continues to a problem for our liaison team (Union and Employer) and we are continuing to explore options to resolve the problem. These actions include:

- Libraries Without Walls (school board policy),
- Library Mission Statement (posted in every library within the Division),
- Inclusion on divisional committees impacting upon the work and wellness on Library Technicians (i.e. library automation, benefits, ICT, etc.),
- Inclusion in school-based, profession-based, and divisional professional development opportunities (i.e. Union developed SAG sessions, technical in-servicing),
- Mentorship opportunities for both new and existing Library Technicians (from induction, to introduction of new skills, to support for and reinforcement of existing skills),
- Building and maintaining a trusting relationship with our liaison superintendent and strong communication with our membership (open, honest communication).

Library Technicians felt that the most effective strategies to address stress at work were to:

- Maintain a positive attitude, and
- Focus on what they can personally control.

The Union's continued positive relationship with the Employer has been cultivated and developed over a number of years and both parties have worked hard to maintain this constructive and encouraging team atmosphere. We have divided our recommendations into four foundation areas: Communication, Problem Solving, Support, and Value.

Communication:

The Union recommends that the Division continue to be mindful of the important of two-way communication and encourage the preservation of the team atmosphere that Seven Oaks School Division is so well known for, and that is felt by most library technicians in our division. Support for this recommendation includes such actions as:

- Continuing the practice of having Union representation on Divisional Committees;
- Encouraging Administration (Superintendents and Principals) to be inclusive in their dealings with library staff and ensuring that information provided to teachers and supervisors is also shared with Library Technicians, where applicable.

Problem Solving:

Collectively, through regular liaison meetings and social gatherings with Library Technicians, the Union and Employer are responsive to the collective and individual needs of Library Technicians in Seven Oaks. Therefore, we recommend that the division's tradition of being proactive with respect to potential problems be maintained. Actions to support this recommendation include:

- Maintaining support for our liaison Superintendent to hold regular liaison meetings with the Union;
- Sustaining the practice of early identification of issues, by both the Union and the Employer, and jointly acting with integrity, mutual respect, and trust in order to attempt resolve.

Support:

Library Technicians in Seven Oaks School Division are responsible for a wide range of duties, and maintain a high standard of professionalism. Therefore, we recommend that the division maintain support for various dimensions of the work we do (technical and wellness) by means of the following actions:

- Preserving the practice of allowing release time for seasonal Library Technicians to mentor both Library Technicians new to the division as well as more established Library Technicians who may need support;
- Continuing to be cognizant of ergonomic issues in the workplace and support the consultation of outside agencies to resolve issues as they may arise.

Value:

As Library Technicians feel that they are contributing members to the educational community, we recommend that the division continue to advocate for the inclusion of Library Technicians in all aspects of participation in that community. Actions to support this recommendation are to:

- Recognize Library Technicians as professionals and, in so doing, continue to explore solutions with the Union regarding the issue of lack of qualified replacement staff;
- Continue to support the inclusion of library technicians in professional development opportunities, as well as encouraging library technicians to participate in professional development opportunities outside of the division.

Due to all of the groundwork the Union and Employer have done together through our liaison relationship, we have been largely successful in creating a positive work environment. By exercising early intervention in dealing with issues and concerns, we have been able to, in most cases, come to mutual resolution before the issue or concern has had a chance to fester and grow. This healthy climate has been conducive to maintaining a happy workforce

We were very encouraged to note that the data retrieved on behalf of SOSD from Kaplan Research Associates specifically for Library Technicians supported our efforts to preserve this harmonious relationship.