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so my child is successful..."

## The Unpaid Work of Education Assistants in Delta School District

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## **Introduction**

In the spring of 2007, CUPE Local 1091 – representing over 900 support staff in District 37 Delta – undertook a survey of members working as Education Assistants (EAs). The survey was intended to compile information regarding the work situation and workload of EAs within the District. A particular focus of the survey was to examine the phenomenon of ‘unpaid work’ where EAs log unpaid hours in the routine course of their jobs, in classrooms and in schools.

This report analyzes the 262 survey responses received back from EAs working in District 37. This response level reflects a survey completion rate that is close to 90 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

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

## **Background**

BC currently employs over 8,000 full-time equivalent educational assistants province-wide with the vast majority working in special education. This is a category of support staff employment, which has grown over a quarter in size in the past decade. It is also a category of staff for which there is rising demand, in Delta as elsewhere in BC. There are different factors associated with this trend. First, there are increased numbers of students with special needs entering BC’s public school system, and more students with multiple disabilities. Second, advances in public and professional understanding of certain special needs areas has brought with it higher rates of student identification within the public school system. Third is a reality of high profile court cases where parents and others have sued for official public school recognition and support for particular physical, medical or behavioural conditions.

Rising demand for special education services comes at a time not only of provincial enrolment decline but also budgetary restraint. While many districts have increased the number of EAs they employ, they have often done this in tandem with intensified controls on the hours EAs are able to work. School boards have typically done this in the interest of containing costs. Stretching EA staff resources to cover the maximum

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<sup>1</sup> The response rate, while difficult to quantify precisely, is very high. In its 2007/08 annual budget, adopted April 30<sup>th</sup> of this year, District 37 projected a total of 269.7 FTE educational assistants that it expects to have on staff in the coming year with 241.4 of this number expected in Program 1.10 Special Education. The latter is an FTE calculation while the survey figure is a headcount. (SD 37 Delta, *Annual Budget for 2007/08*, Schedule A4.)

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range of special education needs is a key way of accomplishing this goal. In general, steps taken in this direction have worked to align assigned and paid hours of work with student contact time. The result is more education assistants working "bell to bell" and a growing reality of part-time employment for this job classification across the public school system.

### The Delta survey

Delta survey respondents were asked to record their job titles and work areas within the District. The following graph gives a breakdown of survey responses in this area.

#### What is your formal job title?

Response	Number	% of Total
Instructional	177	67.6%
Behavioural	58	22.1%
Medical	23	8.8%
Null responses	4	1.5%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

'Instructional Assistants' are the largest EA category in the District. The job description for this position underlines the central role played by these assistants in working with teachers to plan, develop, modify and implement curriculum for special needs students. It also contains provisions for attending to behaviour management needs, for maintaining appropriate records, for communicating with other staff and parents, and for supervising students at all times.

'Behavioural Assistants' have a more specialized focus on student behavioural issues and challenges. In addition to the instructional components set forth in the previous paragraph, this job description draws particular attention to the assistant's role in dealing with behaviour management issues and safeguarding student safety. As can be seen, slightly over one in five EAs participating in the survey are in this group.

'Medical Assistants' are a more specialized job classification in the district. In addition to regular duties, workers in this classification have specialized training and responsibilities in areas such as feeding, dressing and toileting. Medical assistants are also required to offer services in areas like lifting, providing emergency restraint when required and administering medications. Just under nine per cent of survey respondents are in this job classification.

Despite their differences, all EA job descriptions have what could be referred to as "core duties." These centre on assisting teachers with "planning, development, modification,

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preparation and implementation of curriculum, classroom materials and schedules to meet the needs of designated student(s)." They also reference a need to reinforce "concepts introduced by the teacher," to implement "instructional programs designed by

the teacher" and to participate in designing and implementing "appropriate behaviour management strategies" for students. In addition, the duties of all EAs include the need to maintain regular communications with teachers and others, as well as to communicate with parents, when required. These duties presuppose a system of work scheduling that makes it possible for EAs to have the time to properly discharge the work functions and responsibilities that work duties entail.

In certain cases, Education Assistants are assigned to a single student. In other instances, an EA will have responsibility for more than one student. The primary determinant of this is the specific nature of the special education need that an individual EA's job is meant to address. The following chart provides a numeric breakdown of job assignments in this area for those participating in the survey.

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

Response	Number	% of Total
Yes	46	17.6%
No	212	80.9%
Null responses	4	1.5%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

Less than one in five EAs reported working with one student only. Most said their jobs entailed working with more than one student.

Most survey respondents also reported working in elementary schools. The following chart shows close to 70 per cent of respondents' jobs at this level. The remainder reported working within secondary schools in the District.

**Where do you work?**

School	Number	% of Total
Elementary	183	69.8%
High School	78	29.8%
Null responses	1	0.4%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

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

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

<b>Response</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>% of Total Elementary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>% of Total Secondary</b>
Less than 20 hours	5	2.7%	2	2.5%
20 to 25 hours	32	17.5%	8	10.1%
Over 25 and up to 28 hours	81	44.3%	0	0.0%
Over 28 and up to 30 hours	51	27.9%	57	72.2%
Over 30 hours	3	1.6%	6	7.6%
Null responses	11	6.0%	5	6.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>183</b>		<b>78</b>	

A small percentage reported fewer than twenty hours of work per week at both the elementary and secondary levels.

It is when EAs work more than 20 hours per week that the situation facing elementary and secondary assistants starts to differentiate. At the elementary level, almost 62 per cent (five out of eight) of those completing the survey work between 20 and 28 hours. A comparatively small group reports more than 28 hours. The largest single elementary grouping reports 26 hours (65 respondents).

For secondary-level EAs, only one in eight report working under 25 hours. The largest group – almost three-quarters of all secondary-level EAs – reports working between 28 and 30 hours with the biggest single concentration – 57 respondents – falling at the 30 hour mark.

Average workweeks did not vary substantially by job classification. For the 'Instructional' category, the reported average came to 26.9 hours while for the 'Behavioural' category the average came to 26.6 hours. "Medical" education assistants reported an average work week of 27.1 hours.

For the survey as a whole and the 241 EAs who reported both a job title as well as actual assigned work time, the average workweek came to 26.9 hours.

### **Unassigned time**

Education assistants were asked in the survey whether they logged additional work time above and beyond assigned hours. Almost nine out of ten responses indicated that

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assistants did indeed work additional hours. Interestingly, despite the differences in assigned work time affecting elementary and secondary EAs, the inclination to log additional unpaid hours did not vary in any significant way. The following graph gives further details.

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

Response	Number	% of Total	% of Elementary	% of Secondary
Yes	233	88.9%	89.1%	88.5%
No	25	9.5%	8.7%	11.5%
Null responses	4	1.5%	2.2%	-
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>			

While unpaid work is clearly a widespread phenomenon among EAs in the District, there are variances in the amount of this time that is logged on the job. The following table shows the reported breakdown in hours of unassigned/unpaid work.

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

Hours of Unpaid Work Performed	Number	% of Total
Less than 1	55	21.0%
1	53	20.2%
2	69	26.3%
3	23	8.8%
4	16	6.1%
5	9	3.4%
Over 5 <sup>2</sup>	10	3.8%
Null responses	27	10.3%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

The foregoing information makes it possible to calculate average weekly-unpaid work on the basis of the above data.

<sup>2</sup> For the small percentage reporting in excess of five unpaid hours per week, the average amount of such time was 7.1 hours.

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If we assume that those reporting 'less than one hour' worked .5 unpaid hours per week, total reported unpaid time for those completing the survey comes to 468 hours per week. This means that, *each EA in the district logs an average of 2.0 hours of unpaid work in the district each week.* A figure of this magnitude works out to 7.2 per cent of assigned/paid hours for an average EA in the District.

At a rate of \$22.02 per hour for the larger 'Instructional' category, 468 weekly hours of unpaid work represents a total of \$10,062 in wages not collected each week. Over the normal course of a 40-week school year, the total value of unpaid time comes to \$412,214. When wage sensitive pension and other benefits are factored in, *the total annual value of this time comes to about \$470,000.*

Education assistants also report working unpaid hours at various times and points during the week. The following chart shows that the largest group – one-third of those completing the survey – report performing this type of work five days a week. Smaller percentages report working fewer days in this capacity with those reporting one day of unpaid work accounting for a fairly small percentage.

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

Frequency of unpaid work (number of days performed)	Number	% of Total
1 day per week	37	14.1%
2 days per week	30	11.5%
3 days per week	34	13.0%
4 days per week	24	9.2%
5 days per week	86	32.8%
Null responses	51	19.5%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

Education assistants also perform unpaid work at various times during the day. The following table shows the varying percentages reporting unpaid work at specified times.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For this question and the two that follow, more than one response is possible so the percentage values do not add up to a total of 100.

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

<b>When unpaid work occurs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
During breaks	162	61.8%
During lunch	150	57.3%
Before shift	113	43.1%
After shift	168	64.1%
At home	104	39.7%

The largest percentage appears to log unpaid work time either during breaks, during lunch, after shift or in various combinations. However, as can be seen from the data in the table, a substantial number of Education Assistants in the district work at all times: before, during and after work, as well as at home.

Most educational assistants also log unpaid time at multiple points in time during the workday. A total of 28 of 262 survey respondents (10.7 per cent) reported working in two of the above categories (during breaks, during lunch, before shift, after shift, or at home). Interestingly, larger percentages of assistants report working at three or more daily times. The following table provides a breakdown of the most commonly reported combinations in this area.

**When is unpaid work performed?**

<b>Times of Unpaid Work</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total</b>
In two different time periods	28	10.7%
In three different time periods	83	31.7%
In four different time periods	29	11.1%
In all five time periods	29	11.1%

As is evident, the largest groups of EAs report unpaid work in three time periods. What this means is that over half of EAs taking part in the survey likely have no effective break time during the entire workday.

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

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

<b>Task or activity undertaken during unpaid work time</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Consult with teachers or principals	180	68.7%
Prepare materials	168	64.1%
Go on field trips	111	42.4%
Coverage outside assigned time for problem behaviour	73	27.9%
Coverage outside assigned time because of lack of other coverage	55	21.0%
Coverage outside assigned time because parent is late	32	12.2%
Pre-school preparation & monitoring	30	11.5%
Coverage outside assigned time to accommodate transportation scheduling	26	9.9%
Drills, assemblies	23	8.8%
School or OHS Committee attendance	22	8.4%

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

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

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

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Impossible to work assigned hours and provide good service	182	69.5%
Feel pressure from principals	11	4.2%
Feel pressure from teachers	26	9.9%
Feel pressure from co-workers	6	2.3%
Other	117	44.7%

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As is clear, almost 70 per cent of those logging unpaid time said they did so because felt it was impossible to do a good job otherwise. Comparatively few EAs cited pressure from others, whether principals, teachers or co-workers.

A substantial number did however opt for the 'Other' response, and chose to provide more detailed comments to explain their choice. Many EAs cited what are best characterized as 'professional' reasons for performing unpaid work. The following is a sample of comments falling into this category.

<b>Why I work unpaid hours: professional responses</b>
"My choice, my belief that students come first. Sometimes we cannot get to all students who need support in their support block." - High school level instructional assistant
"I wouldn't feel I was professional if I just walked away." - High school level behavioural assistant
"I want to do the best job I can so my child is successful." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"I have a sense of responsibility to help students and teachers." - Elementary level instructional assistant

Other EAs drew attention to 'lack of full coverage' concerns. In many cases, coverage issues related to transportation scheduling problems that would otherwise leave students unattended, or pose health and safety risks. Sample comments in this area are provided below.

<b>Why I work unpaid hours: coverage problems and student transportation</b>
"I am asked to pick up a student early every morning to prepare him for the day." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"This child specifically assigned is not safe to be on own for pickup before or after school." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"The bus arrives early with the kids - I have to supervise outside before school." - Elementary level behavioural assistant

The survey also explored other options including the use of unpaid and unassigned time for the preparation of course materials and meeting with other staff.

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<b>Why I work unpaid hours: time for preparation, modifying materials or meeting with teachers</b>
"No prep time is allotted. I frequently need it to discuss issues regarding the student, outside of assigned hours." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"This usually involves preparing new course material for a new student." - High school level behavioural assistant
"It is the only time available to debrief with teachers regarding students." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"The teacher and I often need time to talk about our day to work out how best to handle things in the future" - Elementary level behavioural assistant

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

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

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	206	78.6%
No	34	13.0%
Null responses	22	8.4%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

As is evident, a sizeable percentage – close to four out of five completing the survey – indicated they would like additional assigned and paid hours. The result is not surprising. A similar percentage indicated they log unpaid work time because they feel they cannot do a proper and quality job in the time that is allocated. What the table above reflects is the fact that EAs feel they should be paid for the additional time they already contribute and a belief that the best way to accomplish this is for the employer to allocate more work time.

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

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

Response	Number	% of total surveys	% of those answering "Yes" to the previous question
Preparation time for work	181	69.1%	87.9%
Meeting time with teachers or administrators	160	61.1%	77.7%
Contact with students	96	36.6%	46.6%
Other	33	12.6%	16.0%

The largest groups of responses here centre on the need for preparation time, and for time to consult with teachers and administrators regarding their work

As with the previous question, there was a substantial volume of 'Other' responses. Many EAs chose to reiterate or emphasize priorities identified in the preceding table. However, others chose to draw attention to other issues. The following table offers a small sample of the kinds of things cited.

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

"Collaboration with other EA's." - High school level instructional assistant
"School-based team meetings." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"Care team meetings." - Elementary level behavioural assistant
"Staff meetings to know what is going on." - Elementary level instructional assistant
"For special occasions like field trips, school programs." - High school level instructional assistant
"Student/parent meetings." - High school level instructional assistant

These comments reflect a level of EA interest in broadening opportunities for communication and collaboration, both amongst the ranks of EAs themselves as well as with other school-level colleagues. They also articulate a clear interest in having stronger connections into the school community, connections often frustrated by 'bell-to-bell' timetabling.

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

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

Response	Number	% of total
Just assigned	233	88.9%
All hours	19	7.3%
Null responses	10	3.8%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

As can be seen, a very large majority of EAs report just assigned hours on time sheets. Just over seven per cent of respondents indicated they did otherwise.

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

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

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	102	38.9%
No	116	44.3%
Null responses	44	16.8%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

Slightly under 40 per cent of those responding to the survey indicated their principals were aware while over 44 per cent said principals were not aware. What this result indicates is the presence in a substantial number of school sites of an agreed informal working arrangement guiding the working of unpaid hours. At the same time, it demonstrates the lack of any such arrangement in an even greater number of school sites.

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

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

Response	Number	% of those answering 'Yes'
I told him/her	19	20.9%
S/he spoke to me about it	12	13.2%
Both	60	65.9%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>91</b>	

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

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

Response	Number	% of total
Yes	82	31.3%
No	93	35.5%
Do not know	67	25.6%
Null responses	20	7.6%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

In roughly a third of cases, EAs report the existence of a banking arrangement and, in another rough third, no such arrangement is reported.

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

A total of 93 open-ended responses – approximately 35 per cent of the total number of completed surveys – were offered in response to this question. EAs generally indicated that the arrangement had them take banked time during professional development days or at times when field trips are scheduled. In a smaller number of instances, the taking of banked time was done in a more ad hoc manner (“anytime that I want”, “whenever it fits into the school year” or “I request a time that is mutually agreeable.”) As the following table indicates, a large degree of informality characterizes most arrangements of this nature.

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

Response	Number	% of Total
Formal	28	26.4%
Informal	78	73.6%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>106</b>	

The survey also asked a series of questions regarding what EAs did to augment income received from employment with District 37. The first question asked was whether individuals worked at other jobs.

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

Response	Number	% of Total
Yes	91	34.7%
No	161	61.5%
Null responses	10	3.8%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>262</b>	

As the data shows, a little over a third of those responding to the survey reported working at another job. Individuals were then asked why they had another job.

**If yes, what are the main reasons you have another job?  
 (Fill in as many items as apply)**

Reason	Responses	% of Total Surveys	% of those answering 'Yes' to previous question
I need the extra money	82	31.3%	90.1%
I am looking to move to a job	2	0.8%	2.2%
My other job pays better	12	4.6%	13.2%
Other	13	5.0%	14.3%

A total of 27 detailed open-ended responses were provided following this question, where individuals could elaborate on reasons why they had jobs elsewhere. Reasons offered centred on the fact that annual EA earnings did not provide a living wage, a need to maintain income during periods when school is not in session and EA income is not forthcoming, and individuals' search for other career opportunities.



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

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

<b>Hours per week</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Up to 5	15	17.4%
6 to 10	30	34.9%
10 to 15	20	23.3%
15 to 20	12	14.0%
Over 20	9	10.5%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>86</b>	

Slightly over half of the 86 individuals answering this question said they worked 10 or fewer hours per week at other jobs; the other near half reported working more than 10 hours per week.

EAs were also asked to comment in an open-ended fashion regarding the hypothetical impact of their refusing to contribute unpaid work hours. A total of 208 responses were provided to this question, many of them quite detailed. The sheer range of issues, concerns and negative potential impacts raised warrant quoting verbatim a sizeable sample of these comments at this point.

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

Grades would plummet and behaviour issues would increase.
Serious behavioural risks would occur, resulting in physical harm to self or others.
They wouldn't receive extra homework help and my students wouldn't be able to attend field trips, camping, skiing, Grade 7 orientation, or track meets, without an adult assigned directly to them.
They would quickly get behind, lose confidence in themselves, and parents would be upset and complain.
Modified and/or adapted materials would not be created. Lesson plans for special occasions would not happen.
If I left on time, sometimes a child would be left hanging in the middle of work.
Adapted and modified materials and projects would not be done properly; students would be unable to maintain a true connection to the class and classmates.
Lack of supervision promotes truancy, bullying, or stealing.
There would be no communication between EA and teacher, and a lot of students would be very rushed out the door each day.
Serious medical problems are possible; continuity of care is very necessary.
Little or no materials would be prepared; service would decline; student left unsupervised leading to disruption in classroom; behavioural problems and flight.
Kids would flounder; work wouldn't be done; self-esteem would suffer, and behaviour problems would escalate.
The child would go home without homework feeling disorganized and overwhelmed, leads to anxiety and negativity towards school. I wouldn't have time to listen to them or to spend time working on social goals/conversation skills.
We wouldn't be a "team" when we approach each child's challenges.
They couldn't attend any evening concert/play and fieldtrips would not be supervised

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

EAs used the “Other Comment” section of the survey form to reiterate issues and concerns expressed elsewhere. In some cases, other issues surfaced. Specifically,

- A number of EAs observed that teachers and others are often unaware that EA time spent on breaks or field trips is not remunerated.
- Another EA expressed the view that job turnover would be lessened if more hours could be provided.
- Another commented that unpaid time may be "unwritten and unsaid, but is made very clear anyway."
- One EA expressed reluctance at voicing concerns over unpaid hours lest it lead to a budget crunch and the District responding by returning special needs kids to resource rooms.
- Several EAs commented on the fact that co-workers are routinely not replaced when absent, thereby intensifying work pressures on others.
- Finally, some EAs raised the issue of paying for their jobs on a salaried as opposed to hourly basis.

### **Summary of findings**

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

- Assigned hours for EAs are, on average, well below the threshold of full FTE. This applies even at the secondary level where more hours on average are allocated to EAs.
- On average secondary-level EAs work about 2.4 hours more per week than their elementary counterparts. When both levels are taken together, an average EA in the District works 26.9 hours a week, which equates to .77 FTE.
- An average EA perform additional unpaid work of about two hours a week. This unpaid work time calculates out to the equivalent of .06 FTE.
- Work is performed at various points in the workday as well as at home, with most EAs reporting that they log unpaid work at multiple points throughout the day.
- EAs perform unpaid work largely for professional reasons (i.e., a perception the work cannot be done to a quality standard without the performance of additional hours, or a perception that students will lose out or be put at risk if unpaid hours are not logged.)
- EAs generally record only assigned time on time sheets and possibly a half of them have some other kind of unofficial arrangement for dealing with unpaid and unassigned time. The remainder do not have an arrangement in place.

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- School administrators who are aware of unpaid work arrangements with EAs have had conversations with EAs about putting these arrangements in place.
- Most EAs would want more assigned hours if they were able to get them. When asked, those wanting more hours generally cited the need for preparation time, for time to meet with work colleagues, or for more contact time with students.
- A large block of EAs work at other jobs with the predominant reason cited as "needing money to make ends meet." The largest group reporting other jobs say they work between six and ten hours a week at these other jobs.
- Open-ended comments about work pressures show a high level of professional commitment on the part of EAs to their work, their classrooms, their schools and, most importantly, their students.

### **Comment**

Unassigned and unpaid work is clearly a norm for Education Assistants in District 37 Delta. The phenomenon of unpaid work is itself the product of compressed work hours and the pressurized situation that working 'bell to bell' puts EAs in. It is also the product of a work environment where, owing to the fact that teachers and administrators are salaried employees without defined hours of work, many EAs find themselves in situations where there are expectations they organize their time on the job in a similar manner.

It is this set of circumstances that places most EAs in a position of contributing unpaid work hours. Most cite concern for students or a sense of obligation to do a quality job, as underlying reasons for their acquiescing to these kinds of arrangements.

These findings raise a number of disturbing implications:

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

- EAs in Delta District are also intended or expected (as per their formal job descriptions) to meet with parents and to relay information regarding the education of their children. Yet, as with teacher supervision, the organization of

work time within the District does not allow for this activity to occur during paid hours.

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

## **Recommendations**

Delta EAs participating in the survey have offered the School District and CUPE Local 1091 a unique opportunity to understand in depth factors behind the phenomenon of 'unpaid work.'

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

- More hours need to be scheduled for EAs. In addition, there needs to be an official acknowledgement on the part of the District that the 'bell to bell' scheduling that characterizes much EA work is the source of most of the problems associated with unpaid work.
- There needs to be better recognition and acknowledgement of the realities of time pressures affecting EA work. Specifically, this would involve recognized time for preparation, planning, consultation, and meetings with teachers, administrators and parents.

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- There is a need for more formal inclusion of EAs into school-level processes associated with the monitoring and evaluation of special needs students as well as planning and communication requirements associated with these tasks.
- EAs also need to feel more part of the 'school community.' Part of this could be addressed by recognition of the need for EAs to be paid to attend staff or health and safety meetings.
- EAs need to be able to take work breaks like other colleagues without facing pressure to backfill the absences of others, to cover students who might otherwise be unattended, or to make on-the-spot adjustments in preparation for the class or assignment to come.
- The District needs to acknowledge the lack of an annual living EA wage for those employed by the District and the consequent need for many EAs to seek additional outside work in order to "pay the bills." There is also a need to acknowledge that widespread and necessary EA "moonlighting" does not serve the District well in efforts to provide quality service and educational coverage to its special needs students.

**Appendix: The Survey Instrument**

**EA QUESTIONNAIRE**

*CUPE Local 1091 ~ Delta School District # 37*

*Updated: February 8, 2007*

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

6. If **yes**, how many extra hours **per week** do you work beyond your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?
- less than 1 hour
  - 1 hour
  - 2 hours
  - 3 hours
  - 4 hours
  - 5 hours
  - Over 5 hours \_\_\_\_\_ (if over 5 hours, how many in a typical week?)
7. If **yes** to question 5, on how many days per week do you work outside your assignment (regular & temporary hours)?
- 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - 3 days per week
  - 4 days per week
  - 5 or more days per week
8. If you work more hours than your assignment, is it:  
(Fill in as many items as apply)
- During breaks
  - During lunch
  - Before shift
  - After shift
  - At home
9. If you work more hours than your assignment, is it to:  
(Fill in as many items as apply)
- Prepare materials for your assignment



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- Consult with teachers or the principals or others
- Provide coverage of child outside assigned hours:
  - a. Problematic behaviour of student at the end of the day
  - b. Transportation scheduling
  - c. Parent late picking up child
  - d. Lack of coverage and unfilled absences
- Pre-school preparation & monitoring
- Drills, assemblies
- Field trips
- School or OHS Committee

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

(Fill in as many items as apply)

- Impossible to work assigned hours and provide good service
  - Feel pressure from principals
  - Feel pressure from teachers
  - Feel pressure from coworkers
  - Other (please describe briefly)
- 

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

- Yes
- No

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

(Fill in as many items as apply)

- Contact time with students
  - Preparation time for work with students
  - Meeting time with teachers or administrators
-

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Other (specify)

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

Just assigned hours

All hours

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

Yes

No

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

I told him/her

He/She spoke to me about it

Both of the above

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

Yes

No

Do not know

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

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17. If there is an arrangement, is it:

A formal arrangement, recorded on a time card and pay slip

An informal arrangement, "in-house" at the school

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18. Do you have a second job outside the school district?

Yes

No

19. If **yes**, what are the main reasons you have another job?

(Fill in as many items as apply)

- I need the extra money to make ends meet
  - I am looking to move to a job elsewhere
  - My other job pays better
  - Other (specify)
- 

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

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

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22. Other Comments:

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