

**TEACHER WELLNESS
IN
HORIZON SCHOOL DIVISION #67**

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ABSTRACT

This is the documentation of a teacher wellness study which was conducted in the Horizon School Division #67 in January, 1996. The study consisted of two parts: a wellness survey of 200 teachers and two in-depth interviews with teachers who experienced stress-related conditions which forced them to take a leave of absence from teaching and use Long Term Disability Benefits. The survey asked teachers about stress level, sources of stress, stress relievers, and health habits. The interviews were intended to provide an insight into teachers' attitudes on stress-related illness, their causes and implications for healthy teachers. These teachers' experience of being on Long Term Disability has also been examined and analyzed in order to make suggestions for improvement in the future. Health habits of teachers who cope well with stress are compared to habits of those who do not. Finally suggestions are made for ways in which school boards, teachers and schools can help teachers to cope with the abundant stress which is evident today.

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Table of Contents

	PAGE
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter One - Introduction	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Chapter Two - Literature Review	4
✓ Definition of Stress	5
Sources of Teacher Stress	9
Coping With Teacher Stress	14
Personal	14
Institutional Strategies	18
Chapter Three - Methodology	20
Framework	20
Research Design	22
Survey	22
Interview	25

Chapter Four -The Results	
The Survey	27
The Interviews	39
Chapter Five -Conclusions and Suggestions For The Future	43
What Teachers Can Do	44
What Schools/School Boards Can Do	47
References	51
Appendices	54
Project Wellness Survey	
Interview Format	
Cover Letters & Consent	

List of Tables

Table 1: Educators Who Indicated Their Work Was Stressful	12
Table 2: Ranking of Stressors By Educators	13
Table 3: HSD Demographics of Study	28
Table 4: HSD Teachers' Opinions Regarding Stress	30
Table 5: HSD Teachers' Ranking of Stressors	31
Table 6: HSD Wellness Strategies of Teachers	33
Table 7: HSD Teachers' Coping Strategies	34
Table 8: Health Problems of HSD Teachers	35
Table 9: Other Factors Affecting Teacher Wellness	37

List of Figures

Figure 1: A Framework For Stress	7
Figure 2: A Guide To Stress Control	15
Figure 3: Stress Project Framework	21

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

About five years ago in our division, there was a committee of teachers set up to look at teacher stress. I remember a fitness instructor visiting our school to assess the level of stress and fitness in our teachers. As a result of the survey, one of our Professional Development days had a session on teacher stress and how to deal with it and some recreational activities were organized in Taber in an effort to address the issue. Unfortunately, the committee disbanded and we didn't hear any more about the topic.

I feel teachers' health is vital to good teaching and learning and therefore, of paramount importance. Every year I have seen a degeneration in my colleagues' general wellness. This could be due to higher expectations and increased workload, a lack of healthy living habits or a result of the natural aging process.

Whatever the cause, I have witnessed the result and I will attempt to address this problem in a positive way. In their study of Teacher Health in Alberta, *Striving For Health: Living with Broken Dreams*, Jevne and Zingle write:

Teaching is now considered among the high stress professions (Hiebert, 1987; Friesen, 1989; 1990; Farber, 1991). Less than 50% of teachers-in-training enter and remain in the school system for 3 years (Williams, 1981). Those who remain are not immune to accidents, chronic illness or stress related conditions. Approximately 600 teachers in Alberta are

presently on long term disability for physical and emotional conditions. Others are considered “at risk” for disability. Teachers cannot share what they do not have (p. i).

I believe this problem will get bigger in the future if we do not attempt to influence teachers and school boards now.

Teacher wellness has been a concern in assessing the effectiveness of our education system. Kyriacou (1987) stated that the international concern with teacher stress and burnout stems from:

...1) the mounting evidence that prolonged occupational stress can lead to both mental and physical ill-health, 2) a general concern to improve the quality of teacher’s working lives and 3) a concern that stress and burnout may significantly impair the working relationship a teacher has with his pupils and the quality of teaching and commitment he is able to display (p.147).

The consequences of stress also have a monetary cost. As Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) indicate, “stress disorders cost (American) organizations an estimated \$15-17 billion each year in lost performance, and health benefit payments” (p.131). In a study done in 1985, Kremer and Hofman noted that according to Carters (1970) and Mark and Anderson (1978), “one out of every four teachers eventually leaves teaching” (p.89).

Many studies have identified some of the major problems or stressors that affect teacher performance and well being. These influences are both systemic and social, often externally authored and beyond the control of the individual teacher. Adult development theorists have identified patterns of behavior that reflect particular stages of development (MacPhail-Wilcox & Hyler, 1985). These stages identify particular times during a teacher’s career when the stressors, referred to above, seem to have the most impact on teacher wellness. This has helped us to understand the causes of and reactions to stress. Professional development studies have explored the use of external

reinforcements such as merit pay and career ladders. Professional development programs attempt to provide stimulation and motivation by providing strategies, activities and social opportunities (Zech, 1993).

Despite all these attempts to target the causes and find solutions to teacher burnout and stress, the problems continue. The majority of remedies identified in the literature are dependent on the availability and appropriateness of external processes. There needs to be an element of self-reliance in successfully coping with the daily impact of job stress.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examines teacher stress in the Horizon School Division #67. Specifically, it addresses the following questions: What is the level of stress experienced in our schools in southern Alberta, specifically, the Horizon School Division? What personal strategies do teachers use to cope with job stress? How do teachers cope who have become ill with stress-related conditions? Why are some teachers able to stay healthy on the job while others are not? What strategies might best be employed by the School Division to combat the problem?

The project begins with a traditional review of the literature on teacher stress and burnout. A description of the methodology used to gather data is presented next. Analysis of the findings of the wellness study makes up the third section, containing survey data and the results of two interviews with teachers who have experienced stress-related illness. Finally suggestions are made in the final section of the report on what teachers and schools/school boards can do to address the problem of stress in teaching.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

We are inundated daily with information on how to maintain health. Various studies are commissioned and reported on the hazards of smoking, obesity, fatty diets and inactivity. The psychological side of health is also being examined more closely; many articles focus on the importance of attitudes and mind-body connections.

Friesen (1989) reports the following stress facts of note to physical health. Seventy percent of current diseases and disorders are stress related. Stress is directly linked to hypertension (high blood pressure) and hypertension predisposes one to atherosclerosis, heart attacks and strokes. These diseases account for close to 50% of the deaths in the United States and Canada each year. Of the adult population, 15-33% have some form of hypertension. Occurrence of stress-related disease symptoms in women is increasing. Ulcers, constipation, colitis, insomnia, many skin diseases, bruxism, chronic anxiety, sexual dysfunction and headaches are all stress-related problems. There is growing evidence that certain forms of cancer are stress-related.

These facts are supported by Dworkin (1987) who found that stress has been implicated in a variety of pathological processes, from heart disease and ulcers to anxiety and sleeplessness. These processes weaken the body and lead to illness behaviour.

Friesen has some interesting advice on stress-reducing actions which may be classified as health habits. He suggests working no more than ten hours daily and keeping at least one and a half days per week free from normal work routine.

At least half an hour should be allowed for each meal and we should eat slowly and chew well. Our diets should be balanced. Relaxing music should become a habit and relaxation techniques or meditation should be practised at least twice each day.

According to Friesen, people should work at a slower pace and cultivate a cheerful attitude. A “get away from it all holiday” is important each year, and so are daily exercise and fresh air.

Kunkel (1991) reports that according to Dr. Martin Collis from the University of Victoria, wellness is a key factor in having such attributes as enthusiasm and a positive outlook. Wellness depends on living a healthful lifestyle and taking care of oneself. Jevne (1991) writes about the importance of hope to getting well physically and emotionally for teachers who have been on long term disability. People with hope report a greater sense of energy and moods which are more up than down. Optimism and realism are characteristics of a hopeful person. According to many studies, wellness is influenced by physical and psychological factors and their contributing health habits.

This literature review will address three concepts as they relate to teachers: the definition of stress, sources of stress and ways of dealing with stress.

Definition of Stress

According to Kyriacou (1987), teacher stress may be defined as: “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression, resulting from aspects of his work as a teacher” (p.146). Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) contend that since “stress is a biochemical reaction within the body, stress is simply one possible reaction to pressure which

may be positive or negative” (p.128). Hans Selye (1974) has defined unpleasant stress as “distress” and pleasant stress as “eustress”. Eustress results from situations which provide challenges and distress results from situations which are perceived as threatening. He says that stress is part of life and not something to be avoided entirely. However, when it reaches the point of distress, it is always unpleasant and can be damaging.

Stress is defined by Bryan Hiebert (1985) as “a complex psychological and physiological reaction to a situation that approaches or exceeds a person’s self-perceived ability to cope with that situation” (p.14). Hiebert believes there are three kinds of stress: environmental, individual response and interactional, and has developed models to conceptualize each. The environmental model assumes that stress is caused by an environmental stimulus and may be controlled by removing or altering the cause of stress. The second model is the response model, where the focus is on the individual’s response to a stressor. Treatment of stress therefore involves helping individuals to react differently to demanding situations. The third model is called interactional and views stress as a cycle which must be dealt with and balanced. Successful attempts to deal with stress allow a person’s system to get back to normal, but unsuccessful attempts allow the demand to become a stressor.

Figure 1 shows Hiebert’s (1985) framework for stress. It shows how some people can cope successfully with stressors, while others cannot. Chronic stress, according to Hiebert can result in organ malfunction.

Cox (1978) supports Hiebert’s view that stress arises from the difference between the demands on a person and his/her ability to cope. Coping is both psychological and physiological and if ineffective, gives rise to functional and structural damage. Ratsoy (1986) compares the physical side of stress to the

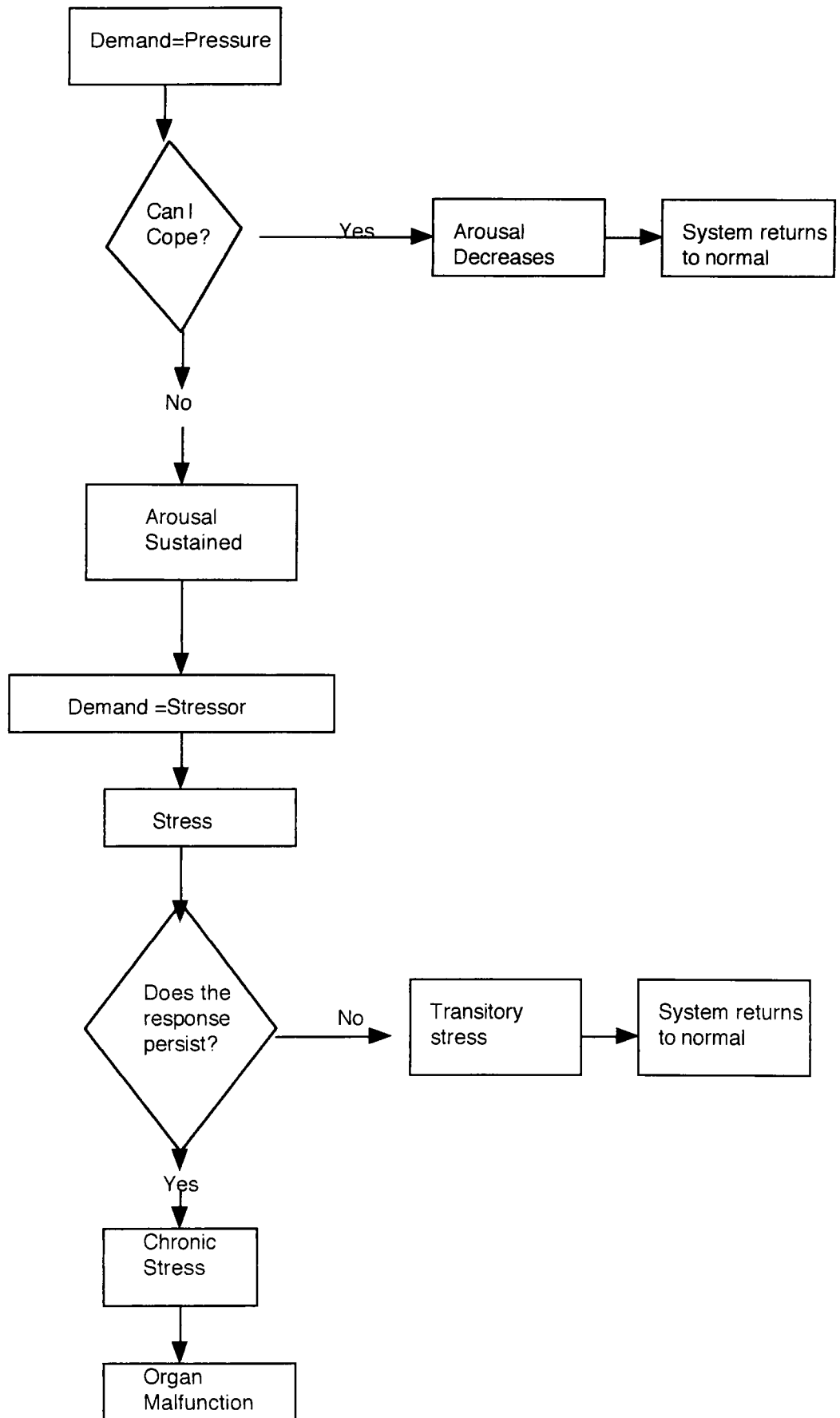


Figure 1: A Framework For Stress
Hiebert, 1985

body's reaction of preparing itself for violent activity, as in fight or flight. Because physical activity rarely follows, the body's systems are thrown out of balance, with excess acid being secreted in the stomach, adrenalin and fat in the blood and higher rates affecting the heart. This chronic preparation for action, without action leads to disease and disorder.

Research indicates that stress manifests itself in psychological responses as well as physical ones. Maslach and Jackson (1981) view burnout as a consequence of unresolved stress. It can take three forms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. Victims complain about the amount and difficulty of their work, become cynical, isolated and uncooperative and do not feel that their work contributions have value.

Most of the definitions of stress I have found have common elements. Friesen (1989) combined them in his definition. He states stress is "a physiological and emotional response to a perceived demand which threatens to exceed the person's capabilities and resources for meeting it and which is perceived to impose serious consequences in case the demand is not met" (p. 25). This will be the definition to which I refer, throughout this review.

The difference between teacher stress and burnout needs to be clarified. When these terms are used synonymously, some confusion results. Burnout results when stress levels are excessive, unresolved or prolonged and may be manifested through a nervous or physical breakdown. I will refer to burnout in teachers on occasion in this chapter. The word stress as used, refers to the negative associations of stress on teachers.

Sources of Teacher Stress

Most researchers tend to agree that teaching is a highly stressful occupation. The stresses of teaching have been compared by Schlansker (1987) to those of surgery and air traffic control. Some have found however, that the amount of stress experienced by teachers is lower than what has been reported by the media (Hiebert, 1985; Ratsoy & Friesen, 1985). We need to remember that what functions as a stressor for one person may not be a stressor for a different person, or even for the same person at another time. Individual perceptions of situations and coping strategies vary considerably.

Hiebert (1985) surveyed teacher and school trustee groups, faculties of education at Canadian Universities and other organizations associated with teaching and education in Canada, in all 10 Canadian provinces, before preparing his report on teacher stress. This represented hundreds of individual responses. He found the three highest ranked teacher stressors to be time pressures, work overload and disruptive students. Next in order as identified by teachers, were interactions with parents and administrators, role ambiguity, and the varied and extensive demands of teaching. In an international review of the literature on teacher stress from 1977 to 1987, Kyriacou (1987) indicates that most studies identify pupils' poor attitudes and too heavy a workload as the main sources of stress, with disruptive pupils contributing significantly. He found the main sources of stress vary from school to school.

Self-perceived levels of stress was the subject of a 1985 study of Edmonton Public School District personnel by Friesen and Ratsoy. They found that the sources of greatest stress were problem students and instructional overload. Not surprisingly, these factors were rated higher by librarians and classroom teachers

than by counsellors and curriculum coordinators. Non-instructional demands and inadequate physical resources were also rated as significant stressors by teachers in the Friesen and Ratsoy study.

Also of interest in this study was the factor of grade level taught. Grades 1-6 teachers had significantly higher stress scores than did their peers in junior/senior high school and kindergarten. This stress level was highest in elementary teachers with 16-25 years of experience. Size of school was also a factor for elementary teachers, showing those from a medium size school (13-25 teachers) had greater stress levels. In high school, Friesen and Ratsoy found stress level was related to subject taught. Social studies and English teachers were most stressed, while math, physical education and vocational education teachers were least stressed. Women showed significantly higher stress scores than men.

Absence of a support group and lack of recognition are cited by Schwab (1986) and Schlansker (1987) as two potential stress-producing factors for teachers. Other factors include lack of participation in decision-making, lack of control, feedback, administrative support and job insecurity. DiGeronimo (1985) found that boredom was also an important factor in teacher burnout. Teachers who were in the same assignment for more than ten years may suffer from lack of variety, challenge and recognition in their professional lives.

This is supported by Friesen and Sarros (1989) in a study done on 128 administrators and 635 teachers in an Alberta school district. They found that lack of job challenge was a major predictor of burnout among teachers. Teachers who felt little challenge in their work tended to be more cynical toward colleagues and students and to feel a lack of achievement in their work.

Dworkin (1987) attempted to study why teachers plan to quit teaching by interviewing a sample of public school teachers from the Houston Federation of

Teachers. Psychological aspects of burnout, he found, stem from the frequency and intensity of interactions in a teaching setting, role ambiguity and conflict. Three factors were major predictors of teacher burnout: meaninglessness, isolation and powerlessness. When inconsistent role expectations are presented to individuals and when there is a lack of clear-cut and consistent information regarding the rights, duties and responsibilities of the teacher, the situation is laden with stress. Apparently not all teachers find their work meaningful, or have collegial support and input into decisions affecting them.

Bennett, Ginsberg, Olson and Schartz (1986) conducted research on schools as a workplace. They identified two major sets of stressors: organizational and teaching-related. Organizational stressors included poor security, discipline problems, inadequate facilities, mismanagement and lack of supplies. Teaching-related stressors included isolation, lack of recognition, lack of respect from community and few rewards for exceptional work.

A recent study of teachers in Ontario reported by King, Warren and Peart (1988) ranked the ten most stressful aspects of being a teacher. They are in order: time demands, too much marking, lesson preparation, discipline/attendance problems, student lack of motivation, lack of administrative support, colleague's negative attitudes, working conditions, lack of security, large class size, Ministry directives and changing curriculum and lack of public/parental support.

Besides the above factors, Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) mention scant support from top administrators, job insecurity and dealing with increasing standards of performance as stressful. Staff interpersonal interactions and poor physical plant also contribute to teacher stress as noted by Hiebert and Farber (1984).

Interesting to note, is that in Friesen's 1990 study in which he did a

comparison of previous research on stress experienced by Alberta educators, both teachers and administrators perceived their stress levels to be significantly higher than they did in studies of previous years (see Table 1). Almost 29% of teachers found their work to be 'very' or 'extremely' stressful in the 1989 study, compared to 21% in 1986 and 14% in 1984. One of the new stressors cited by Friesen was the lack of proper placement for students with special needs. Inclusion became a provincial mandate in 1989 and may account for the extra stress placed on classroom teachers. Other stressors not previously identified were problems with curriculum changes which were implemented before materials became available and excessive emphasis on student evaluation. Refer to Table 2 for Friesen's Ranking Of Stressors of Educators.

Table 1
Percentage of Educators Who Indicated that
their Work was Very or Extremely Stressful
1984-1989

	Studies	Teachers	Administrators
1984	Ratsoy & Friesen	14.3%	11.7%
1986	Sarros	20.8	9.4
1986	Friesen	21.4	16.9
1989	Random Alberta Sample (Friesen)	28.7	23.2

Source: Friesen (1990, p6)

Table 2

Ranking of Stressors by Percentages of Educators Who Found the Experiences Very or Extremely Stressful (1989)

	Teachers (N=326)	Principals (N=57)
1. Heavy workload	56.5%	51.7%
2. Lack of placement for students with special needs	55.3	35.2
3. Over-sized classes	55.3	25.0
4. Lack of time during school day to get work done	52.2	44.6
5. Disruptive students	46.9	26.8
6. Curriculum changes implemented before materials available	45.0	47.3
7. Student marks used to evaluate teachers	44.8	21.8
8. Conflict situations	43.4	23.2
9. Volume of student evaluation activities	40.4	23.2
10. Being required to make frequent role changes	39.8	32.7
11. Unmotivated students	37.0	21.4
12. Lack of administrative support	35.1	16.0
13. Implementing policies with which you disagree	34.8	19.7
14. Non-instructional duties during the school day	33.3	30.3
15. Involuntary transfer	33.1	18.2
16. Perceived shift in role of central office from consultive to inspection	32.9	25.5
17. Lack of participation in making decisions that affect your work	31.0	16.1
18. Media treatment of the teaching profession	29.7	17.9
19. Conflicts with students	28.4	16.1

Source: Friesen (1990) p.12

According to the literature, the sources of teacher stress within the school system are many and varied. They are due to environmental factors such as workload, interpersonal relationships and increased standards of performance. Teachers become fatigued physically and mentally from hundreds of interactions with students and other staff members each day.

There are many other stressors in teachers' lives which may be classified as personal. These include such things as death of a family member or close friend, divorce or personal illness. Though important, these stressors are individual and therefore, beyond the scope of this discussion.

Coping With Teacher Stress

Specific strategies for dealing with stress will be dealt from two perspectives: personal, or what teachers can do themselves and institutional, or what schools and school boards could do to assist teachers. The personal category will be divided again into physical, cognitive and social/emotional.

Personal

Hiebert (1985) states that the most obvious form of stress control would be to change the situation. When this is not possible, a stress management approach is necessary which focuses on physiological, cognitive or behavioral interventions which alter the person's reaction to the stressor (See Figure 2).

In Friesen's 1989 study, he asked teachers to rank options on how to deal with stress. The dominant response was to take direct action. This would involve removing the source of stress or other environmental strategies. The next two in order were to strengthen abilities to cope and seek support and resources. Female

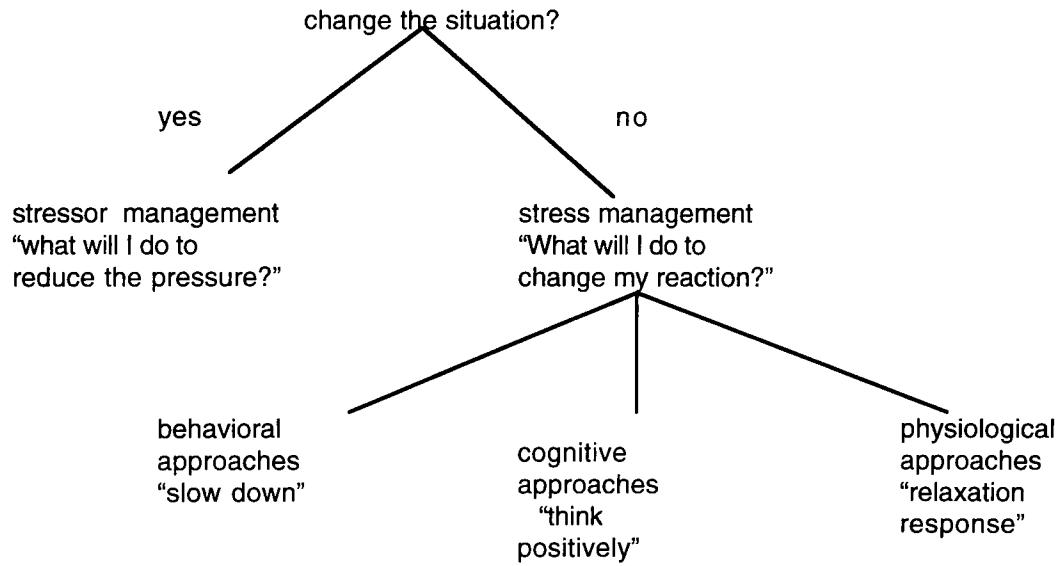


Figure 2: A Guide to Stress Control Hiebert, 1985

teachers and principals had the tendency to respond to stress by working harder, to a greater extent than male teachers.

Respondents in Friesen's study (1989) rated more exercise as the number one strategy for coping with stress that they could do themselves. Relaxing more was another physical strategy that was perceived as valuable. Wankel and Berger (1990) find that there has been substantial research evidence which supports the association of psychological well-being with regular exercise. The exercise program must be non-competitive, aerobic and regular to decrease anxiety and tension. Sixty percent of 1,750 physicians polled, reported that they prescribed exercise for the management of anxiety. Physiological benefits of exercise include elevated endorphin levels, increased body temperature, changes in respiratory patterns, increased blood flow and oxygenation to the central nervous system.

Hiebert (1985) agrees that people who are aerobically fit have greater stamina and recover from stress more quickly than their less fit peers. Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) suggest that a physical sport appropriate to age helps; so does walking; so does laughing. Kyriacou (1987) discusses 'palliative techniques' used to control stress, like playing squash after school, to be an effective coping technique. Another strategy he has found effective is to avoid confrontations with stress-producing people or situations.

Other physical techniques for coping with stress include relaxation exercises (Kyriacou, 1987), biofeedback and meditation (Kaiser & Polczynski, 1982), eating a balanced diet rich in Vitamins B and C (Hiebert, 1985) and self-hypnosis (Hiebert & Farber, 1984). Each of these techniques has well-documented success rates in dealing with stress.

Feelings of tension, anger and agitation could be reduced according to Dunham (1984), through out-of-school activities such as gardening, painting,

walking, cooking, baking, cycling, driving your car fast and praying. Community activities such as bell-ringing, squash, badminton, football, drama and choral singing are also good stress management strategies.

The next major category dealt with in the literature was cognitive or mental techniques to deal with stress. The focus of Hiebert's (1985) suggestions in this area is for the teacher to develop a positive, encouraging and supportive self-dialogue. Teachers should reassure themselves that it's okay not to have all the answers.

Teachers in Friesen's study (1989) felt they need to be more realistic, have lower expectations, develop a sense of humor, not take themselves so seriously and learn to say "no". Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) urge teachers to avoid paranoia by "crediting others with the same good motives you possess" (p.134) and to recognize their own capacities. Kyriacou (1987) advises teachers to alter their perception of the circumstances by putting things into perspective and trying to see the humorous side of the situation. Strong belief systems and coping skills were documented by Veninga and Spradley (1981) as major keys to a stress management program. A recurring theme seems to emerge here: change what you can, accept what you can't and don't beat yourself up over it.

Stress relievers can also fit into a social/emotional category. In fact, according to Dworkin (1987) social support systems have often been cited as buffers between stressors and the expected outcomes of stress, including illness and burnout. Kyriacou (1987) states that teachers need to express feelings and seek support from their colleagues and family or friends. Noon hour and after school discussions which take place in the staff room help those involved to see that others have the same problems and secondly, to offer some advice on how to handle the situation. Blowing off steam by talking seems to be a good stress

reducer. Friesen's study (1989) supports this advice. Teachers found that talking about concerns and developing a support network was vital to learning to cope with stress. He also found that developing outside interests was important.

Dunham (1984) refers to interpersonal resources which teachers used to cope with stress. These included talking over stressful incidents with their husband or wife, meeting people who were unconnected with teaching and talking to a friend who had a similar job. Using these people as a sounding board and having a social life outside of school was seen by Dunham as vital to survival of teachers. The importance of family time and relationships cannot be overemphasized. Enjoyment of family life is seen as a great stress reliever.

Institutional Strategies

Another major area mentioned in the literature to reduce stress was changing the situation to reduce pressure, thus enabling people to cope (Hiebert & Faber, 1984). Things schools can do include defining role expectations and reducing interruptions. Direct action is the more desirable strategy if such action can be effective (Kyriacou, 1987). This can be accomplished according to Hiebert by altering the environment, reducing class size, lowering the work load, creating supportive environments or reducing annoying disturbances.

French and Caplan (1972) found that individuals who participate in decision-making relating to their work report lower psychological stress. This makes sense as teachers are empowered to deal with issues and concerns and are more likely to take ownership of problems and credit for success. The respondents in Friesen's study (1989) felt that schools and school boards could give support by providing more stress workshops and seminars, and a climate for laughter and relaxation. Recognition and positive feedback were also felt to be

good anti-stress strategies.

In Friesen's study (1989) it was suggested that school boards could make leaves and sabbaticals more easily accessible, provide higher wages, smaller classes, and more classroom assistants. Other things include having strong discipline policies, more preparation time and time for marking and distributing the workload more evenly. Slowing down curriculum change and providing opportunities to share work were also considered important.

Listening to teachers by administrators and accepting that teacher morale is vital to good teaching is important in this category. If principals can be supportive and concerned and treat teachers as colleagues, rather than subordinates, teacher burnout and plans to quit are reduced, according to findings by Dworkin (1987). Teachers' feelings of power and meaningfulness are also increased.

In conclusion, the research has suggested many ways to reduce stress. They include physical approaches: exercise, relaxation techniques and good nutrition. Secondly, cognitive stress reducers were shown to be supportive self-dialogue and putting things into perspective. The third category encouraged collegiality and venting frustration through conversation. The last stress reducer was altering the environment and using management techniques to lower stress levels.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

General Framework

My research needed to address the following questions: What is the level of stress experienced in our schools in southern Alberta, especially the Horizon School Division? What personal strategies do teachers use to cope with job stress? How do teachers cope who have become ill with stress-related conditions? Why are some teachers able to stay healthy on the job while others are not? What strategies might best be employed by the School Division to combat the problem?

I wanted to study factors affecting stress level in the Horizon School Division. These included gender, age, type of school, marital status, position held, size of school, and years of experience. The effect of stress level on sick days taken and comfort levels of stress were analyzed. Finally the effects of positive attitude and environmental factors on stress levels were examined.

I chose to diagram the framework for my project (See Figure 3). I felt the effects of personal factors, stressors, copers and wellness strategies all have an impact on teacher stress. Personal factors include things like gender, age and type of school which were mentioned in the previous paragraph. Stressors are factors which were noted in the literature such as discipline problems, time demands, lack of support from administration and working conditions. Wellness strategies include diet, exercise, sleep, relaxation techniques and positive attitude. Copers are

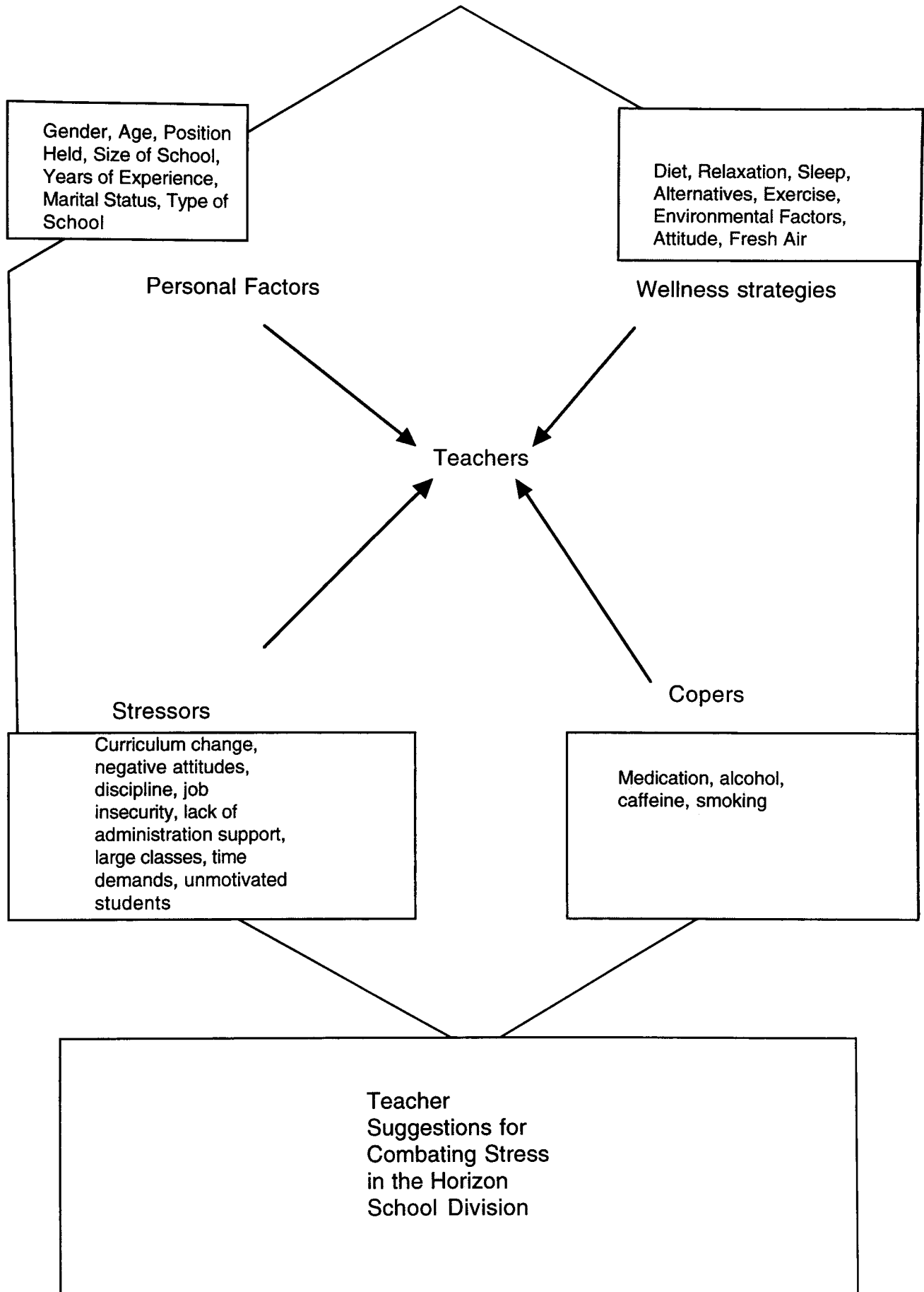


Figure 3

medication, alcohol, caffeine and smoking. Stressed teachers who are currently teaching have ideas on how to improve job situations to reduce stress. Stressed teachers who have been ill, have suggestions for other teachers on how to avoid illness.

Research Design

Population

The population targeted for this study was all the teachers in the Horizon School Division #67. Distribution of 204 surveys to 18 schools began on January 16, 1996. When I delivered the surveys I tried to speak personally to each principal, asking for their cooperation in returning the forms and although this was not always possible, I did manage to speak to someone on staff. Survey distribution took three days because of the immensity of Horizon School Division.

I chose to use two instruments for the collection of data: survey and interview. I will begin with a brief description of each.

Survey

The literature review that I completed revealed some teacher stressors and coping strategies. It also supplied some of the elements that I used to analyze the problem of teacher wellness in the Horizon School Division (HSD). These include Friesen's study (1990) which ranks the most stressful aspects of being a teacher. I used his list to compare to the findings of my survey. Coping strategies of teachers in HSD were compared with those found in the literature review.

The survey was four pages in length and contained five sections (see Appendix). Section I covered biographical information: sex, marital status, age, years of experience, type of school, size of school, current position held and sick days last year. Section II covered stress levels and whether or not teachers were comfortable with their level of stress. A four point scale was used in this section: 1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Agree and 4 Strongly Agree. This section was included to deal with the first research question: *What is the stress level experienced in schools in Southern Alberta, specifically the Horizon School Division?* The final part of section II asked teachers to rate the top 3 conditions in their school which contribute to teacher stress.

Section III dealt with teachers' personal health habits. The literature review indicated that questions about exercise, diet, smoking, sleep and relaxation habits were important. The effects of asthma, high blood pressure, chronic fatigue, neck and back pain, headaches, stomach ailments and nervousness were assessed. Again, a four point scale was used: 1 Not At All, 2 Seldom, 3 Occasionally and 4 Regularly. This section deals with two research questions: *What personal strategies do teachers use to cope with job stress?* and *Why are some teachers able to stay healthy on the job while others are not?*

Section IV asked questions about other factors which may affect health. These included school ventilation, lighting, and cleanliness. Personal attitudes toward life, health and genetic predisposition towards disease were questioned. This section used the same scale as Section III and refers to the same research questions.

The final section of the survey dealt with coping strategies used by teachers. Respondents replied in a written format to questions about their most effective coping strategy, the most important thing they could do to improve their health and

what the school division could do to improve teacher wellness. This section also deals with two research questions: *What strategies might best be employed by the School Division to combat the problem of teacher stress?* and *What personal strategies do teachers use to cope with job stress?*

The survey was piloted in a University of Lethbridge grad class. The class was made up of 20 Faculty of Education graduate students who were practising teachers, nurses and special needs personnel. I asked them to fill out the questionnaire and to pay special attention to the format and types of questions asked. As a result I was able to do a sample analysis and get suggestions for improvement by rewording and clarifying items.

Analysis of Survey. A quantitative analysis was done on the results of the survey using a program called Statsview to calculate descriptive statistics. Distribution frequency, standard deviation and the mean were calculated for sections 1-3. The results of Section IV were tabulated manually by computer, since it contained written responses to short answer questions. One answer was recorded for each of 3 categories: *most important coping strategy for stress, one health improvement strategy, and what the school or school board could do to help teachers cope with stress.* Responses were grouped into sub-categories to reflect similarities. Coping strategies included exercise, talking, spending time with family and backing off from school work. Health improvement strategies were things like more exercise, better diet and losing weight. School and school board responses were grouped into sub-categories like more preparation time, lower class ratios and cutting down on non instructional expectations.

Interview

The second instrument used to gather data was an interview which I used with two teachers who had been on Long Term Disability leave from their jobs within the past two years. Both teachers had taught for Horizon School Division and were interested in sharing their stories. The research question which was answered by the interviews was: *How do teachers cope who have become ill with stress-related conditions?* Interviews took about one hour each and were completed on January 18 and February 14, 1996.

Interviews were taped and later transcribed by computer. In this way I was able to ensure accuracy by recording the exact words of the interviewees. The interview consisted of eight questions (see Appendix 2), and was given to the teachers in advance so they could think about their responses. Typed transcripts were given to the interviewees for approval before being used as part of the results of this project.

The interview asked about teaching background and their experiences while on LTD leave from Horizon School Division. The causes of the disability and their possible link to job stress were covered. The interviewees were asked about their lifestyles as a factor in their illnesses and preventive measures for other teachers.

Interviews were concluded by asking what school boards can do to promote teacher wellness and how individuals can help themselves. Coping strategies when dealing with stress were also covered.

I feel the interviews were an important part of my study because they revealed the personal side of teacher illnesses which may be linked to job and personal life stress. No one likes to admit that they may be a candidate for Long Term Disability and I think we can learn a great deal from individuals who have

been there. Practical experience may be the most important coping strategy when dealing with stress and wellness issues.

Interview Analysis. The above procedures were used to gather qualitative data for this project. Transcribed interviews were not included in order to protect teachers' identities, but an analysis of the interviews is included in Chapter 4. Common themes were identified by listening to tapes, highlighting transcripts and writing applicable quotes on index cards. Themes which appeared often in the literature review were highlighted, as well as points which were emphasized strongly by the interviewees. Similarities in interview responses were found, but unique differences between the two individuals also became apparent. These will be documented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESULTS

Surveys

By February 7, 1996 I had received 147 completed surveys from my target population which was all the teachers of the Horizon School Division. This represented a return rate of 70%, with 17 out of 18 possible schools represented. After initially delivering the questionnaires, I made only three phone calls reminding schools to send their surveys in. I was pleased with the level of response, considering teachers' heavy workload and the amount of paperwork they face every day.

Section I

Responses were received from 95 females or 64.6% of the respondents, and 52 males which represented 35.4% of the respondents. This represents a typical sample of the total population of teachers in Horizon School Division, since there are 129 (62%) females and 80 (38%) males on staff.

There are other relevant facts pertaining to the respondents (see Table 3). Eighty per cent were married, with 20% either single, divorced or separated. Most of the teachers of HSD who responded to the survey are in the 41-50 age group (34%), with only 14% older and almost 52% younger. For years of experience, 43% had less than 10 years, while 22% had more than 21 years. The majority of the respondents taught in Elementary Schools (41%), with only 14% from High Schools. In HSD there are 5 Elementary, 5 Elementary/Junior High, 3 Grades 1-

Table 3

**Horizon School Division Wellness Survey
Demographics
N=147**

Gender	Female 95(64.6%)	Male 52(35.4%)			
Marital Status	Single 23(15.7%)	Married 119(80.9%)	Divorced 2(1.4%)	Separated 3(2.0%)	
Age	20-30 36(24.5%)	31-40 40(27.2%)	41-50 50(34%)	51-60 20(13.6%)	60+ 1(.7%)
Years Experience	0-5 46(31.3%)	6-10 17(11.6%)	11-15 29(19.7%)	16-20 23(15.7%)	21+ 32(21.8%)
Type of School	Elementary 61(41.5%)	Junior High 65(44.2%)	Senior High 21(14.3%)		
Size of School	Under 100 24(16.3%)	101-300 90(61.2%)	300+ 33(22.5%)		
Current Position	Classroom 114(77.6%)	Administrator 18(12.2%)	Special 6(4.1%)	Other 9(6.1%)	
Sick Days	0 49(33.8%)	1-5 86(59.3%)	6-10 7(4.8%)	11+ 3(2.1%)	

12, 1 Junior High, 1 Senior High and 2 Junior/Senior High Schools.

Many of the teachers who responded, especially from smaller schools, had overlapping duties in that they taught at more than one level. The majority of the schools that responded to the survey (61%) had a student population of between 100 and 300 students. This reflects the rural nature of HSD, since 11 of the schools have school populations of between 100-300 students and only two are over 300 students.

Classroom teachers made up the majority of the respondents (78%), while the remainder were administrators (12%) and special assignments (10%). The special assignments and other category included teachers who were classroom support, special education or counsellors. Sick days taken were also documented, with 33% of teachers taking no sick days and 59% taking only 1-5 days. Only 2% of teachers took more than 11 sick days last year.

Section II

Table 4 shows the HSD's teachers' opinions regarding stress. Over 92% of respondents agreed that they experience stress in their jobs. Of these, 69% showed that they were comfortable with the amount of stress they experience, but 31% were not. When asked if the amount of stress in their jobs was making them ill, 18% agreed. Therefore, almost one third of teachers surveyed are uncomfortable with the amount of stress they experience, even though it may not be making them ill at this time. This is slightly higher than Friesen's study in 1990 where he found 28.7% of teachers reporting similar stress levels. Over 55% of the teachers found their jobs physically exhausting, while 80% agreed that their jobs were mentally and emotionally exhausting. Only 26% of respondents felt that they

Table 4
HSD Teachers' Opinions Regarding Stress
(N=147)

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I experience stress in my job.	2(1.4%)	9(6.1%)	80(54.4%)	56(38.1%)
I am comfortable with the amount of stress I experience.	20(13.6%)	26(17.7%)	87(59.2%)	14(9.5%)
I find my job physically exhausting.	12(8.2%)	54(36.7%)	70(47.6%)	11(7.5%)
I find my job mentally & emotionally exhausting.	7(4.8%)	22(15%)	81(55.1%)	37(25.1%)
I have personal life stress that affects my job.	34(23.1%)	75(51%)	30(20.4%)	8(5.5%)
The amount of stress in my job is making me ill.	53(36.1%)	67(45.6%)	24(16.3%)	3(2%)

Table 5

**HSD Teachers' Ranking of Stressors
(N=147)**

Item	No 1's	No 2's	No3's	Total	M
Time Demands (Marking, Lesson Preparation, Administrivia)	36	22	25	177	29.5
Student lack of motivation, apathy, negative attitudes	21	26	30	145	24.2
Discipline problems, student confrontations	17	23	12	109	18.2
Changing curriculum content Dept. of Ed. directives	16	20	15	103	17.2
Lack of job security, declining enrollments	14	11	10	74	12.3
Colleagues' negative attitudes, incompetent teachers	11	4	8	49	8.2
Large class sizes	7	9	7	46	7.7
Working conditions, lack of equipment	6	7	5	37	6.2
Lack of public and parental support	5	6	8	35	5.8
Others	4	5	5	27	4.5
Lack of administrative support	3	4	5	22	3.7

1-Most stressful 2-second most stressful 3-third most stressful

had personal life stress that affected their jobs.

The next part of the survey dealt with ranking teacher stressors (see Table 5). The results partly agree with Friesen's 1990 findings which are shown in Table 2. Both studies found that heavy workload or time demands was the number one ranked stressor. HSD teachers ranked student lack of motivation as second, as compared to Friesen's ranking as number eleven. Discipline problems and student confrontations were found by HSD teachers as third most stressful, while they appear fifth on Friesen's list. Fourth highest, as ranked by HSD teachers was Changing Curriculum content. This was sixth on Friesen's ranking.

The Others category which appeared tenth on HSD ranking included such things as parent confrontations, teacher evaluations, the shortened school day with few breaks, keeping up-to-date on technology and unrealistic expectations of school administrators. Special needs of students, increasing public expectations, split classes, ECS cutbacks, extra-curricular demands and interruptions by the Division's Maintenance Crew were also mentioned.

Section III

Table 6 documents the wellness strategies of teachers in HSD. Sixty-one per cent of the teachers who responded to the survey, exercise occasionally or regularly. Almost 90% indicated that they have a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide and 80% try to control the amount of fat in their diets. When asked if they were overweight, 44% agreed. Only 33% of the teachers surveyed did not take the time to relax each day. Most (68%) have regular medical check-ups and 26% use alternative health care treatments like chiropractic and massage. When asked if they get out to enjoy fresh air and sunshine, 79% replied affirmatively and

Table 6**Wellness Strategies of Teachers
Horizon School Division #67
(N=147)**

Item	Not At All	Seldom	Occasionally	Regularly
Do you exercise for fitness at least 3X/week for 20 minutes?	29(19.7%)	28(19.1%)	42(28.6%)	48(32.6%)
Do you have a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide?	2(1.4%)	13(8.8%)	54(36.7%)	78(53.1%)
Do you try to control the amount of fat in your diet?	11(7.6%)	18(12.4%)	55(37.9%)	61(42.1%)
Are you overweight?	55(37.4%)	27(18.4%)	30(20.4%)	35(23.8%)
Do you take time to relax each day?	9(6.1%)	40(27.2%)	54(36.7%)	44(29.9%)
Do you have regular medical check-ups?	17(11.6%)	30(20.6%)	42(28.8%)	57(39%)
Do you use alternative health care treatments to maintain health?	88(59.9%)	21(14.3%)	20(13.6%)	18(12.2%)
Do you get outside and enjoy fresh air and sunshine?	1(.7%)	30(20.4%)	61(41.5%)	55(37.4%)
Do you sleep well each night?	10(6.8%)	18(12.2%)	46(31.3%)	73(49.7%)

Table 7

**Horizon School Division's Teachers' Coping Strategies
(N=147)**

Item	Not At All	Seldom	Occasionally	Regularly
Do you try to control your caffeine intake?	28(19.2%)	22(15.1%)	36(24.7%)	60(41.1%)
Do you drink alcoholic beverages more than once/week?	89(60.5%)	24(16.3%)	20(13.6%)	14(9.5%)
Do you smoke?	135(91.8%)	3(2%)	4(2.7%)	5(3.4%)
Are you subjected to second-hand smoke?	72(49.3%)	51(34.9%)	15(10.3%)	8(5.5%)
Do you take prescribed medication?	68(46.3%)	31(21.1%)	17(11.5%)	31(21.1%)
Do you take over-the-counter medications?	41(27.9%)	63(42.8%)	32(21.8%)	11(7.5%)

Table 8

**Health Problems of HSD Teachers
January, 1996
(N=147)**

	Not At All	Seldom	Occasionally	Regularly
To what extent do each of the following conditions affect your job performance?				
ASTHMA	126(88.1%)	10(7%)	3(2.1%)	4(2.8%)
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE	128(88.9%)	8(5.5%)	5(3.5%)	3(2.1%)
FATIGUE	103(71%)	23(15.9%)	13(9%)	6(4.1%)
NECK PAIN	77(53.5%)	27(18.8%)	30(20.8%)	10(6.9%)
HEADACHES	71(49.3%)	41(28.5%)	20(13.9%)	12(8.3%)
STOMACH	102(70.8%)	23(16%)	12(8.3%)	7(4.9%)
NERVOUSNESS	97(66.9%)	32(22.1%)	15(10.3%)	1(.7%)
OTHERS	19(61.3%)	2(6.5%)	4(12.9%)	6(19.3%)

81% indicated that they sleep well at night.

Coping strategies may be used to deal with stress which are not necessarily healthy (see Table 7). Teachers were asked if they try to control their caffeine intake and 66% do, but conversely, 34% do not. More than 23% drink alcoholic beverages more than once/week. Only 6% of teachers surveyed indicated that they smoke, but 16% are subjected to second-hand smoke at least occasionally. Prescribed medication was used by 33% of surveyed teachers and over-the-counter medication was taken by 29%.

Health problems of teachers in HSD were surveyed and are shown in Table 8. Results show that HSD teachers are relatively healthy. Frequencies of asthma, high blood pressure, chronic fatigue, stomach ailments and nervousness are low. Neck pain was suffered by 28% of respondents and headaches by 22%. Of the 31 teachers who responded to the Others category, arthritis, allergies, eczema, colds, flu and fatigue were cited as significant factors affecting job performance.

Table 9 shows other factors affecting teacher wellness in HSD. Over 39% of surveyed teachers did not think their rooms were well-ventilated and 17% thought their rooms were not clean. Most of the teachers (90%) thought that the lighting in their schools was adequate. All of the respondents to the survey felt that they had a positive attitude towards life and the vast majority (96%) felt that they were healthy people, although 25% indicated that they have a genetic predisposition towards disease.

I did four crosstabulations when doing my analysis to determine if there were significant relationships between stress levels and type of school, gender, diet and exercise. There were no significant relationships, but a few interesting things showed up. Stress levels seem to be slightly higher in Elementary schools; 11% of teachers in the high stress category as compared to 8% in Junior High and 9% in

Table 9

**Other Factors Affecting Teacher Wellness
Horizon School Division
N=(147)**

Item	Not At All	Seldom	Occasionally	Regularly
Is your room at school well-ventilated?	37(25.7%)	20(13.9%)	41(28.5%)	46(31.9%)
Is your room clean?	6(4.1%)	19(12.9%)	56(38.1%)	66(44.9%)
Is the lighting in your school adequate?	6(4.1%)	8(5.4%)	40(27.2%)	93(63.3%)
Do you have a positive attitude towards life?	0	0	34(23.6%)	110(76.4%)
Do you feel that you are a healthy person?	0	6(4.1%)	45(30.6%)	96(65.3%)
Do you have a genetic predisposition towards disease?	86(61.9%)	19(13.6%)	19(13.7%)	15(10.8%)

Senior High. This supports Friesen's 1989 study. Of high stress respondents, 29% exercise regularly, while 33% of low stress teachers exercise regularly. Male stress levels (12%) are slightly higher than female stress levels (8%) in HSD. However, because of the lack of significance, these findings cannot be considered meaningful without further study; they could be chance results.

Section IV

The final section of the survey dealt with coping strategies of teachers in HSD. This consisted of a written response to questions. The first one asked for was the *teachers' most effective coping strategy when dealing with stress* (see Appendix.) Common themes were found in the responses. The most commonly mentioned effective coping strategy at 28 responses, was exercise or sports not related to school. Eighteen teachers listed talking and ten said spending time with family was a valued coping strategy. Seventeen teachers recognized the importance of backing off from school work and worries by relaxing and gaining a new perspective. This could be done in many ways: naps (15), smiling and laughing (6), listening to music (3), hobbies (11), reading and watching T.V (11) or using spiritual meditation (1). Four of the respondents listed the importance of keeping a positive attitude and celebrating personal successes.

The next question asked, was *the ONE most important thing you could do to improve your health*. The majority of teachers (65) responded with more exercise, better diet and losing weight. 'Taking time for me' was also mentioned often (12), as was rest (10) and learning how to relax(2). Three teachers responded with taking on less of the extras; eight teachers stipulated cutting out caffeine, smoking or drinking alcohol.

The final question in this section asked teachers *what the school/school division could do to improve teacher wellness*. The most common response (20 teachers) was more preparation time for teachers and administrators. Sixteen teachers would like to see lower class ratios and year round schooling or a 4 day work week. Many teachers (12), thought that schools should cut down on the demands which are not instructional and give wellness days in lieu of sick days. Six teachers thought that more support from administration on discipline problems was most important. Maintaining clean schools with windows and good ventilation was mentioned by five teachers.

Interviews

The interviews contain some common themes and some differences. Both of the interviewees were anxious to talk to me about their experiences while on ASEBP Long Term Disability. Originally, this had not been part of my research template, but after listening to both interviewees, I realized its importance. ASEBP is the Alberta School Employees Benefit Plan, which was set up to provide a source of income to teachers who cannot work due to illness.

The interview questions were shared with the interviewees prior to the taping session, in order to help them prepare for the interview. About ten minutes was spent at the beginning of the interview, reviewing the process and format, before taping began. After the interviews had been transcribed, they were given back to the interviewees for final approval before being used as part of this project.

Teaching background and experience of the two interviewees varied. One had taught for HSD for 18 years and the other for less than one year. One was a classroom teacher and the other a music specialist. Their disabilities were also

unrelated; one had a physical problem, while the other suffered from clinical depression. Both felt however, that job stress had made a significant contribution to their illnesses and resulting long-term leave. Interview 1 shows the frustration felt by the teacher: “Other professions have time, time in the office to do things, we don’t. Everything is piled on us to take home. If teachers had more time, there would be less stress on teachers.” This frustration is reflected as well in Interview 2: “Inadequate prep time contributed to fatigue and the previous expectations of the program were not as high as mine were.”

Their experiences with ASEBP were also very different, one was very positive and the other, negative. During the first interview, the teacher said that while dealing with ASEBP, “there was one continuous delay after the other,” and that “I got different stories every time I phoned.” And further, “if I had been very ill and unable to call them, say in the hospital, who would take care of me? ...You think it’s so easy, and I only wanted it for one month, that’s all! God help the people who need it for 2 or 3 years.”

During the other interview the tone was different. “No there weren’t any problems whatsoever. The ATA representative was extremely helpful in telling me who to get in touch with, what I should do and all that.” The only problem noted during this interview was the difficulty in getting some occupational or career counselling through ASEBP. “My claims facilitator knew lots about Edmonton, but very little about Southern Alberta. She was also overworked, with 200 cases, I wouldn’t hear from her for months at a time.”

Both of the interviewees had good advice for other teachers. They stressed the importance of physical exercise, diet and staff wellness activities. They also both spoke about the importance of taking time for themselves, to relax, reflect and wind down. “It takes a crisis for you to sit down and say, look what’s happened to

me. I don't want to be like this. I preach to people now. I say, get home and do something for yourself."

When asked what the school and school board could do to promote teacher wellness, responses varied. One teacher thought professional development activities were most important, with support from administrators being essential. The other teacher felt that the ATA should be doing more to promote the image of teachers in Alberta. "I think the ATA could have ads on T.V. like they do in the States where big stars tell about their lives and they'll say, 'A teacher is responsible!' They don't do that here in Canada; they don't build teachers up that way."

Giving teachers more time to do work at school and rewarding them with wellness days in lieu of sick days was considered important. Slowing down the pace of the school day was another strategy mentioned to promote teacher wellness. "Teachers are just going at a frantic pace everyday. They don't even have time to sit down and have a good meal and actually talk to their colleagues."

The importance of having support from colleagues and administration at school was stressed in both interviews. "At one school I was at they had a mentor program and I think these work very well as long as they aren't superficial. You have to feel that you can confide and have confidentiality." "I felt nobody cared about me and I started coming to the conclusion that if you're not well and you can't work there's nobody out there who even cares!"

The interviews provided a window into two teacher stories. Fortunately the stories both ended happily, with the teachers returning to work. The frustration of dealing with bureaucracy while trying to access benefits of ASEBP was clearly evident. This supported Jevne & Zingle's findings in *Striving For Health: Living With Broken Dreams*. Many of the teachers in their study found their claims'

facilitators to be overloaded and unable to devote enough time to individual needs. This is unacceptable, especially when teachers are ill.

Most of the literature I have read while researching for this project deals with wellness strategies and stress relievers. Not much has been written about what happens when an individual succumbs to illness. I think the interviews provided some helpful information in this area.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

My survey did not reveal any new facts regarding teacher stress. It confirmed that stress, often at unhealthy levels, does exist. Coping and wellness strategies are individual in nature and are affected by personal health habits and lifestyle. I was pleased with the response to my survey, at 70%. Although high, this does not reflect the opinions of 100% of the teachers in HSD, since there was no obligation to respond on the part of all teachers. Perhaps the most stressed, disenchanted and unhappy teachers did not respond. Nevertheless, Horizon School Division seems to be a well-functioning school district which is staffed by healthy teachers.

Timing may have affected the results of my survey. It was given in January, after a relaxing Christmas holiday. Achievement exams for grades 3, 6 and 9 were still in the distant future. Many spring activities were only in the planning stage and there were no contract negotiations at the time. If the survey had been given at a different time of year the results could have been very different. HSD has benefited from strong leadership during the past several years. As a result, amalgamation and budget cuts have not affected HSD to the extent that they have affected other districts within the province. This may or may not change in the future.

In studying teacher wellness in the Horizon School Division, I gained some personal insights into myself as a teacher. I was able to analyze my own stress level and perceptions of the sources of stress in my job. I was able to identify with

the common sources of stress experienced by others and their coping devices. At this point, I can empathize with teachers who have experienced stress and burnout to the extent that it made them physically ill. I realize the difficulty they faced as they struggled to heal themselves.

I have always believed in the importance of exercise and proper nutrition in the maintenance of a healthy body. My experiences as a student in the Faculty of Physical Education reinforced these beliefs. A lot of personal time has been spent reading and researching alternatives to traditional health care practices. This study has impacted the way I view stress by bringing to light the complicated nature of the subject and the variety of individual responses to it. It has also reinforced the need for teacher education, organizational strategies and other coping devices.

Stress will always be present in any profession. Documented evidence is available on the high correlation of stress in the “helping professions” where human interactions and problem-solving are an on-going, daily part of the job. Acceptable levels of stress have a positive influence. Stressful situations often provide challenge and excitement to the job. Individuals perceive stress in different ways, some enjoy it, others feel overwhelmed. This is the dangerous part of stress, since it can lead to illness and burnout. What are we going to do about it?

What Teachers Can Do About It

Sometimes as teachers, we need to step back from our present reality and give ourselves the opportunity to reevaluate goals and directions for the future. My study sabbatical at the University of Lethbridge has given me the time to reflect on my working reality, its stressors and coping mechanisms. It

has been a very beneficial exercise.

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation is promoting wellness workshops called *Time For Me*, in their province.

These workshops are based on the assumption that educators know the importance of exercise, good nutrition, time management, problem solving, and effective communication. What interferes with an educator's ability to perform at a high level is a lack of time to put into practice what he or she knows about good health and a lack of energy to follow through with plans that are developed (Taylor, 1996, p. 10).

Participants leave the workshops with a list of refuelling ideas and a personalized plan of where to start toward a healthier, more satisfied self. Achieving a successful balance between home and work can take from three to five years according to Taylor.

I think it is time the ATA began giving wellness clinics instead of stress workshops. Perhaps this would be a more positive way to address the issue. Teachers need to support and learn from each other if real change is going to occur.

Many of the teachers who were surveyed in HSD used exercise as a stress reliever and many more would like to make exercise a reality in their lives. Sparks and Hammond (1981) comment that a person can have more energy after exercise than before. In addition to helping melt away the day's fatigue and frustration, it can contribute to a person's self-esteem. They urge teachers to get started on a regular exercise program and to think, "I'm beginning today to exercise for the rest of my life" (p. 21). I am in full agreement with their advice and find no more important area to stress for the maintenance of teacher wellness.

Most of the teachers in HSD who responded to my survey said they had a healthy diet. There are some, however, who do not. According to Sparks and

Hammond (1981), 'junk food' like coffee and doughnuts can be worse than eating nothing. This is because consumption of such foods raises blood sugar quickly and then drops it. During this time a person is more susceptible to stress and mild irritations may turn into catastrophes.

I would personally rather use alternative health care treatments to handle stress than medication. This is not true of the majority of teachers in HSD, who use both prescribed and over-the-counter medication frequently. I have found both chiropractic treatments and massage to be very effective in treating stressed muscles which in turn can cause headaches. Digestive complaints can often be overcome by eliminating certain foods or eating less at a meal. Sleeplessness can also be treated effectively with a hot bath or a glass of hot milk. According to Bradshaw (1994), "more doctors are realizing that a holistic view of health is preferable to the strictly chemical or surgical curing of sickness and disease after they have occurred" (p. 45).

Relaxation techniques are not used by many teachers in HSD. When I considered why, I realized that like many other stress relieving strategies, teachers consider that these techniques take too much time. We equate relaxation techniques with yoga and transcendental meditation, when in reality, they could be as simple as deep breathing, listening to quiet music or doing simple stretching exercises. Wilson (1992) suggests taking five minutes for yourself at the end of the day, to unwind, switch gears and refresh yourself before tackling domestic chores.

Dyer (1985) writes that "it is my understanding that you cannot get an ulcer when you are laughing" (p. 15) He believes that humor is good for your health. Sadly, few teachers in HSD mentioned humor as an important strategy in coping with stress. Sometimes I think we forget to look at the lighter side of

the situation, both inside and outside the classroom. It is important that students and other staff members view teachers as 'real people', with the ability to laugh and lighten up.

I would like to mention one other very important factor in maintaining personal wellness. This is our own attitude regarding our jobs, the way we see our students and other staff members. According to Dyer (1985), teachers must have a sincere and genuine affection for our colleagues and pupils because learning occurs best in an environment of caring. This means that teaching is more than a job; it is a professional career choice and needs to be considered in that way. We need to spend less time focusing on our problems, disappointments and pressures and more time reflecting on the encouragement, inspiration and satisfaction we have received as a result of relationships with students and staff.

Teachers have the power to change situations which are stressful. Newman (1995) suggests changing grades, schools, taking a sabbatical or leave, going to part-time or quitting altogether. She says money becomes less of a factor when a person feels excited about living. Teachers need to stop 'sweating the small stuff' and learn to say 'no' to unreasonable demands and expectations. This is not selfishness, but simply self-preservation. We need to take care of ourselves, because in the long run who else will do it?

What Schools/School Boards Can Do

Many teachers in my survey mentioned the importance of recognizing successes in our schools. This should not include only teachers who have won major awards for classroom instruction and professional work. What about the

other hardworking teachers in our system who strive to ensure maximum student achievement in their classrooms, but are never recognized? Reasoner (1995) states that most schools make significant progress every year and we need to take the time to celebrate. Too often schools and the media focus on the problems and shortcomings of education.

Another area which needs to be addressed by our schools is time management. I think teacher development in this area needs to be ongoing, since it is so closely linked with successfully dealing with stress. Workshops within the division could be held more often, to keep teachers aware of the latest techniques that could be used. Wanko (1994) mentions a few of them: recognize that you alone cannot do it all, prioritize work that needs to be done and work on the most important items during the time you have the most energy, handle each piece of paper only once and delegate responsibilities to others including students.

Schools need to recognize the importance of good staff morale and work towards achieving it. Martin (1995) gives some valuable advice on how school administrators can achieve high staff morale. This begins with modeling honesty, confidentiality and sincerity. Personal interviews and notes to teachers helps to keep the communication channel open. Describing positive programs and actions of each staff member improves school climate. Release time could be given by the administrator to allow teachers to meet, observe or participate in other professional development activities. Happy teachers lead to improved instructional programs and higher academic achievement. Our school leaders need to recognize this and promote teacher wellness through strategies which affect staff morale.

School climate issues also need to be addressed by schools. Teachers

in HSD cite lack of student motivation as the second highest source of stress in their jobs. Obviously, teachers and parents need to work together to remedy this problem. The importance of achieving an education cannot be emphasized too often to students and ways must be found to make school exciting and enjoyable as well as educational.

An effective support system for teachers needs to be in place in any school system. This could take the form of a mentorship program where experienced teachers share their expertise with other teachers. Staff members are not always comfortable with taking their problems and concerns to the administration. Discipline strategies and policies should be in place in every school to ensure continuity among staff members. I believe many discipline problems could be prevented when everyone, staff and students know the rules.

Another support system that was suggested by survey respondents was for the division to provide information on wellness and fitness programs, teacher counselling services, and wellness days in lieu of sick days. Getting group rates for HSD personnel at local health clubs or providing access to fitness equipment in schools would be one way of doing this. To qualify to get a wellness day, a teacher could teach for two months for instance, without using a sick day. This would reward healthy teachers for staying that way.

Since the first division-wide committee for the promotion of teacher wellness wasn't highly successful, I suggest schools should try to do something at the local level. If there was a wellness coordinator at each school perhaps this vitally important area wouldn't be forgotten.

Finally, I would like to see information on ASEBP's Long Term Disability plan become common knowledge in schools. As ATA representatives and Division Office staff change it becomes more difficult for teachers to know who to

go to when they need advice or assistance. All teachers should be aware of the exact nature of the policy, what is covered and how to apply. This would help to alleviate a lot of frustration with the system.

By working together, I think teachers, schools and school boards can develop and utilize effective teacher wellness programs. To be successful, all stakeholders must be willing to act, not just talk about the problem. Being proactive is perhaps the most important element in the process. Achieving improved teacher wellness will be the reward.

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APPENDICES

TEACHER WELLNESS SURVEY

Section I Biographical Information: Circle the letter of the correct response.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Sex: a) female
b) male</p> | <p>2. Marital status: a) single
b) married
c) divorced
d) separated</p> |
| <p>3. Age: a) 20-30
b) 31-40
c) 41-50
d) 51-60
e) 60+</p> | <p>4. Years of experience as an educator:
a) 0-5
b) 6-10
c) 11-15
d) 16-20
e) 21+</p> |
| <p>5. Type of school:
a) elementary
b) junior high
c) senior high</p> | <p>6. Size of school:
a) under 100 students
b) 101-300 students
c) 300+</p> |
| <p>7. Current position held:
a) classroom teacher
b) administrator
c) special assignment
d) other (please specify)
<hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/></p> | <p>8. Sick days last year:
a) 0
b) 1-5
c) 6-10
d) 11+</p> |

Section II Stress Level:

Please respond as honestly as possible. Circle the number which best reflects your opinion:

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

SD D A SA

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) I experience stress in my job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) I am comfortable with the amount of stress I experience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

	SD	D	A	SA
3) I find my job physically exhausting.	1	2	3	4
4) I find my job mentally/emotionally exhausting.	1	2	3	4
5) I have personal life stress that affects my job.	1	2	3	4
6) The amount of stress in my job is making me ill.	1	2	3	4

7) From the following list of conditions contributing to teacher stress, rank the top 3 as they relate to your job. Use 1 to indicate the most stressful condition, etc.

- ___ Changing curriculum content, Dept. of Education directives
- ___ Colleagues' negative attitudes, incompetent teachers
- ___ Discipline problems, student confrontations
- ___ Lack of administrative support
- ___ Lack of job security, declining enrolments
- ___ Lack of public and parental support
- ___ Large class sizes
- ___ Student lack of motivation, apathy, negative attitudes
- ___ Time demands: too much marking, lesson preparation, "administrivia"
- ___ Working conditions, lack of equipment etc.
- ___ Others, please list _____

Section III Personal Health Habits:

Please use the following scale to answer the questions in the next section:

	1	2	3	4	
	NOT AT ALL	SELDOM	OCCASIONALLY	REGULARLY	
1) Do you exercise for fitness at least 3X/week for 20 minutes?	NO	S	O	R	
	1	2	3	4	
2) Do you have a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide?	1	2	3	4	

	NO	S	O	R
3) Do you try to control the amount of fat in your diet?	1	2	3	4
4) Do you try to control your caffeine intake?	1	2	3	4
5) Do you drink alcoholic beverages more than once/week?	1	2	3	4
6) Are you overweight?	1	2	3	4
7) Do you smoke?	1	2	3	4
8) Are you subjected to second-hand smoke?	1	2	3	4
9) Do you take time to relax each day?	1	2	3	4
10) Do you have regular medical check-ups?	1	2	3	4
11) Do you use alternative health care treatments to maintain health? (Chiropractic, Massage, Psychotherapy etc.)	1	2	3	4
12) Do you get outside and enjoy fresh air and sunshine?	1	2	3	4
13) Do you sleep well each night?	1	2	3	4
14) Do you take prescribed medication?	1	2	3	4
15) Do you take over-the-counter medications?	1	2	3	4
16) To what extent do each of the following conditions affect your job performance?				
Asthma	1	2	3	4
High Blood Pressure	1	2	3	4
Chronic Fatigue	1	2	3	4
Back or neck pain	1	2	3	4
Frequent headaches	1	2	3	4
Stomach ailments	1	2	3	4
Nervousness	1	2	3	4
Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4

Section IV Other Factors: Remember 1= not at all, 2= seldom, 3= occasionally and 4= regularly

	NO	S	O	R
1) Is your room at school well-ventilated?	1	2	3	4
2) Is your room clean?	1	2	3	4
3) Is the lighting in your school adequate?	1	2	3	4
4) Do you have a positive attitude towards life?	1	2	3	4
5) Do you feel that you are a healthy person?	1	2	3	4
6) Do you have a genetic predisposition towards disease?	1	2	3	4

Section V Coping Strategies:

1) What is your **MOST** effective coping strategy in dealing with stress?

2) What is **ONE** most important thing that you could do to improve your health?

3) Name **ONE** most important thing that the school/school division could do to improve teacher wellness:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Feel free to add any comments.

Interview Format

- 1) What is your teaching background?

- 2) How long have you been teaching for Horizon School Division?

- 3) You have been on Long Term Disability leave from your job within the past two years. Please relate your experiences.

- 4) What were the causes of your disability? How did job stress contribute? Were your lifestyle or health habits a factor? (Diet, exercise, smoking etc.) What role did personal life stress play in your disability?

- 5) How can we, as teachers, prevent this from happening to others?

- 6) What should be done by schools/school boards to promote teacher wellness?

- 7) What do you do now to promote your own health that you didn't do before your illness?

- 8) What's your most important coping strategy in dealing with stress?

January, 1996

Dear Colleague:

I am conducting a study of teacher wellness within Horizon School Division #67. The purpose of this study is to improve teacher wellness by assessing teachers' stress levels and finding the relationship between teachers' health habits, working environments and the ability to cope with stress.

I anticipate that you will benefit from participation in this study by addressing teacher wellness within our own division. I will be exploring coping strategies as well as causes of stress. We all know what healthy living habits are, but do we live them? How can we promote wellness of staff within the Horizon School Division?

All information will be handled in a confidential and professional manner. Responses will be reported in summary form only. No attempt will be made to identify individual schools or teachers. Please DO NOT put your name on the form. I will assume your participation gives me consent to use this information as part of my research findings. There is no obligation on your part to participate.

I very much appreciate your assistance in this study. I will be making the results of the survey available to all schools. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 654-2608. Also feel free to contact the supervisor of my study, Myrna Greene (329-2251) and/or any member of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairperson of the committee is Peter Chow (329-2443).

Yours sincerely,

Carol Lien Jones
Master of Education Student
University of Lethbridge

January, 1996

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my study on teacher wellness. The purpose of my study is to assess teacher wellness in Horizon School Division and to look for strategies to cope with job stress for our employees.

I feel that interviewing teachers who have been on long term disability leave recently is very important. From your experience you will have many insights to offer on the topic of teacher wellness.

All information will be handled in a confidential and professional manner. I will tape record the interview to assure accuracy and transcribe the results. I will protect your privacy and anonymity by using pseudonyms in the written account. Also I will ask you to read and approve the transcribed interview before publication.

I appreciate your assistance in this study very much. I will be making the results available to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 654-2608. Also feel free to contact the supervisor of my study, Myrna Greene (329-2251) and/or any member of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairperson of the committee is Peter Chow (329-2443).

Yours sincerely,

Carol Lien Jones
Master of Education Student
University of Lethbridge

I, _____ agree to participate in this study.

Name

Signature

Date