

Educator Leave in South African Ordinary Public Schooling System

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EDUCATOR LEAVE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN ORDINARY PUBLIC SCHOOLING SYSTEM

Vijay Reddy, Cas Prinsloo, Tshilidzi Netshitangani,
Relebohile Moletsane, Andrea Juan,
Dean Janse van Rensburg

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Education will be a key priority for the next five years. We reiterate our non-negotiables.

Teachers should be in school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils! The children should be in class, on time, learning, be respectful of their teachers and each other, and do their homework.

Purpose of the Study

- To investigate educator leave:
 - (i) extent
 - (ii) patterns and reasons
 - (iii) recording
 - (iv) administration and management
- Make recommendations towards decreasing leave rates and improving administrative practices concerning leave.

Reference Committee

- M.Potterton – Catholic Institute of Education
- B. Fleisch – Wits University
- P Colditz – Federation of Governing Bodies of South Africa
- C Klopper – SAOU
- Z Gosani – SACE
- R Somnath and JJ Lewis – SADTU
- Z Kambuhle – National Association of School Governing Bodies of South Africa
- Research Division: Department of Education, H Narsee

Definition of Leave

Educator leave includes being away from school:

- per leave measures stipulated by conditions of service
- for professional development activities
- on official duty and
- participation in school activities like sports and excursions.

Educators include both teachers and management

Information sources

- Literature – national and international
- Policy scan
- Existing data (PERSAL; 2008 Khulisa Consortium 4% audit; estimates from other studies)
- Site visits (to 50 schools and their district and provincial offices)
- Related stakeholder respondents



Perspectives to Study Educator Leave

LEARNERS

- Have a right to education and no instruction time should be lost.
- Regulated in Sec 36 of the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

EDUCATORS

- Right to fair labour practices & conditions of service.
- Regulated in the Constitution; Basic Conditions of Employment, Labour Relations Act; and Employment of Educators Act: the *Personnel Administrative Measures*



(1) EXTENT OF LEAVE

Information and rate calculation

- Good administrative data in high-income countries (HICs) enable reliable leave rate calculations.
- Poor data exist in low-income countries (LICs). Much less is known about their leave rates. The main source is World Bank National Absence Surveys.
- No specific national educator leave studies exist in South Africa, we can only **estimate** leave rates.
- Comparison of leave rates across studies is difficult, because formula for rate calculations differ.

Estimates of leave rate for South Africa

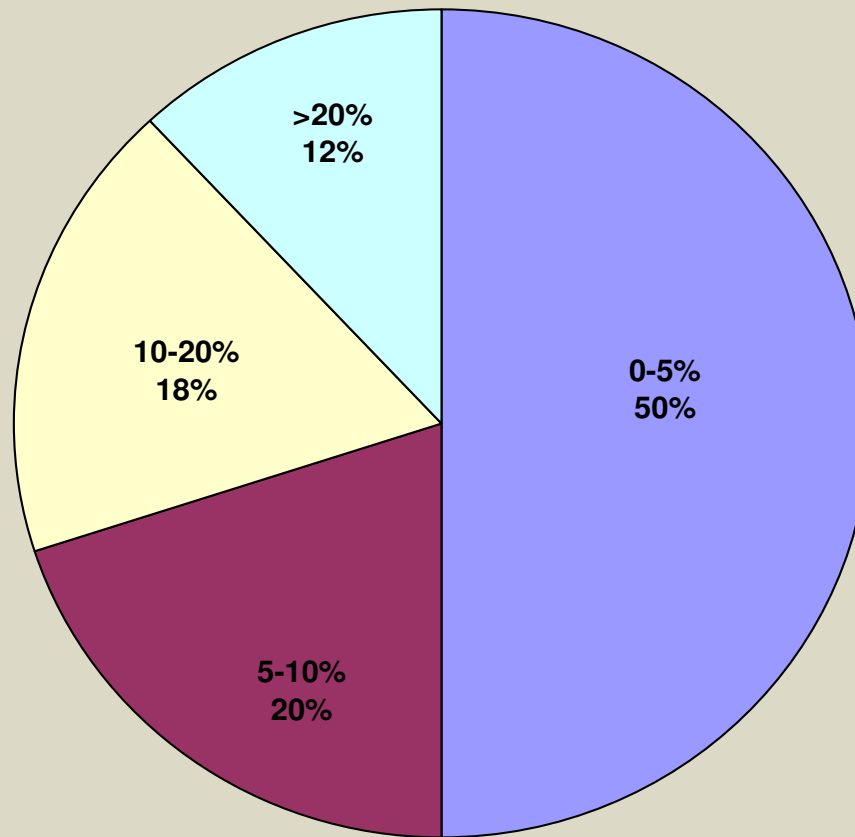
Using past studies, our conservative optimistic estimate is that the educator leave rate for South Africa is 10-12%.

About a quarter of all leave taken is for official duties. Thus the leave rate according to leave measures is 8 to 10%.

There are 200 school days. This implies loss of instructional time of 20 to 24 days per educator per year, with around 6 days per educator for official business.

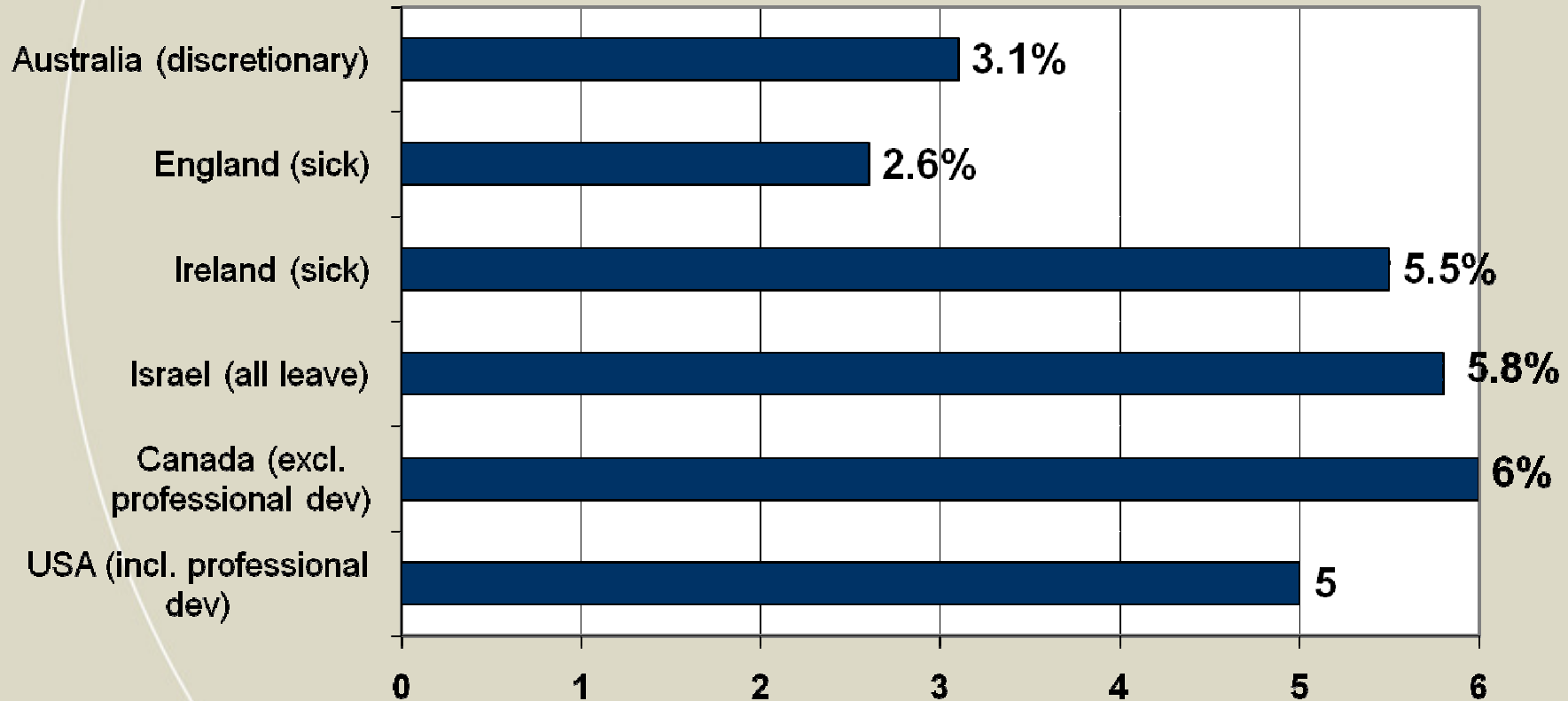
Extent of leave: by schools

Source: 2008 DoE 4% audit; conservative optimistic



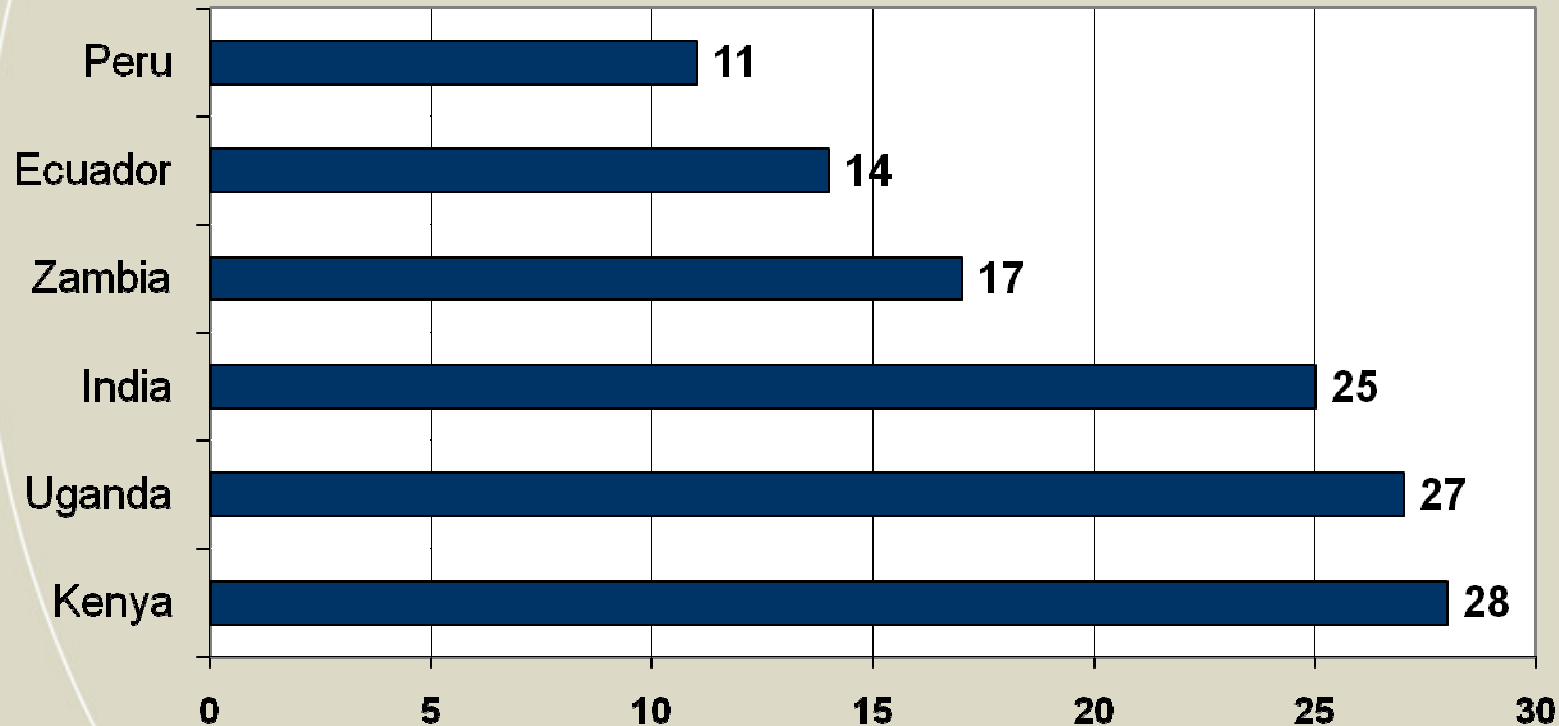
Almost one third of schools have leave rates greater than 10%.

Extent of Leave: High-Income countries



Systems of substitute teachers compensate for teacher absence. In lower grades families generally compensate for lost time.

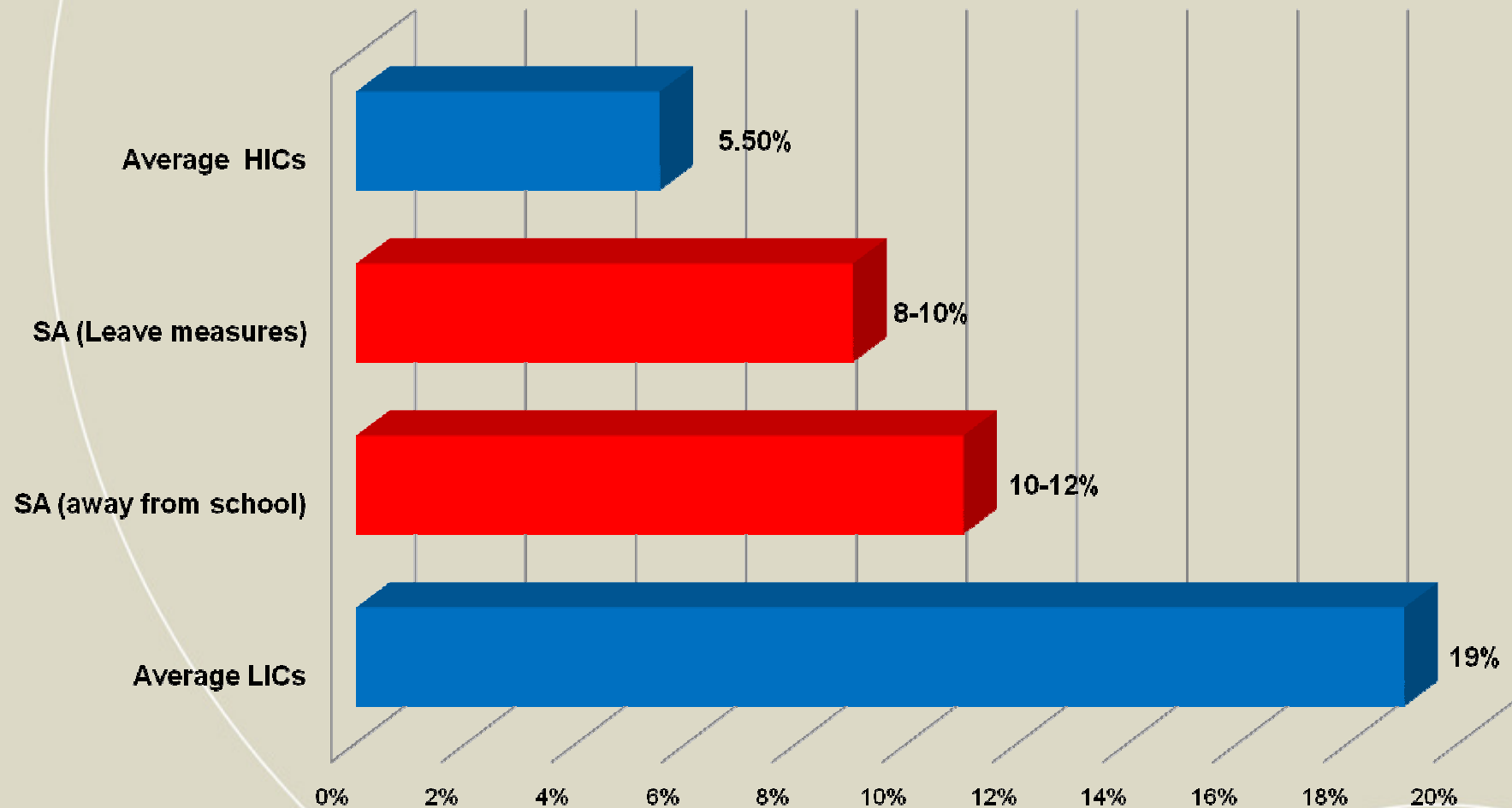
Extent of Leave: Low-income countries



- [Source: World Bank National Absence Surveys (WBNAS)]

Variations depend on geographic location and the socio-economic conditions of schools & community; little or no provision for substitute teachers; unlikely that home can compensate for loss of learning time.

South African Leave Rates compared to LICs and HICs





(2) PATTERNS AND REASONS FOR LEAVE TAKING

Patterns of leave taking

- Mondays and Fridays are the most 'popular' days.
- The majority of leave instances are of 1-2 days duration. That is discretionary leave which does not require a medical certificate to be produced.
- Variations of leave taking by province and between school rates and the poverty levels of the community.

Timing of leave days

2	3	4	5	6	February 2004	2	3	4	5	6	August 2004
3688	1995	1935	1793	2961		4066	2541	2010	1991	4404	
2581	1569	1398	1401	2710		0	3356	1805	1507	2901	
2408	1503	1427	1505	3099		2610	1649	1536	1447	3145	
2774	1921	1944	1753	3781		2457	1714	1437	1983	2895	
						2598	1431				

Reasons for leave and absence

The main reasons for leave taking are:

1. Sick leave
2. Urgent Private Matters and
3. Family Responsibility.

Leave for Official Activities

- Educators leave regular teaching to attend curriculum workshops; examination moderation, accompany students on excursions, etc.
- Principals are obliged to attend many meetings.
- We estimate close to a quarter of all 'leave' days are due to official reasons.
- Educators in smaller and rural schools leave schools more to attend official activities.



(3) RECORDING TO LEAVE

Leave recording and PERSAL

- There is an under-recording on the PERSAL system.
- This may be due to educators not completing leave forms at school or leave forms are completed but not captured onto the electronic system.
- The longer the route between completing leave form to capturing the lower the rate of captured leave.
- The under-recording has both financial and management implications.



(4) ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Administration and management of leave

- In general, governance, management and administration systems in schools are largely in place. However, strategic management engagement to reduce the extent of leave taking was limited.
- Leave management support to schools varied across provincial, regional, district, circuit and services centre offices.
- There is a substitute policy, and schools use this especially for maternity leave. However, rural schools struggle to find appropriate substitutes for mathematics and science in secondary schools



Recommendations to reduce leave rates

Recommendations

1. **Reduce time away from regular school and classroom activity:**
 - Reduce number of days of absence for professional development and other training workshops
 - Cap number of days that principals attend to official business away from school
 - Manage high levels of discretionary leave (especially Mondays & Fridays)

Recommendations

2. Prioritise the reduction of educator leave rates in schools where it is higher than 10%

- With district support, target the initial interventions in the 30% of schools with leave rates higher than 10%.

3. Improve systems to record leave onto PERSAL

- Reduce number of steps between the time that educators complete the leave form to its capturing onto the electronic system
- Implement electronic leave administration at schools

Recommendations

4. Improve leave administrative systems and support in schools

- Have an administrative clerk with computer skills at every school, who has to ensure completion of leave forms, keep school records and monitor leave trends.
- School leave systems must be able to produce outputs showing patterns of leave misuse
- Principal and School Governing Body should assume strong role in monitoring trends of individuals and managing any excessive leave taking.

Recommendations

5. Improve working conditions at schools

Ensure that schools are pleasant, safe and comfortable places that will motivate educators and learners to attend school more regularly

6. Calculate and Monitor national leave rates

- Develop an instrument to calculate leave rate
- Record leave for official business on a central database
- In the meantime, improve integrity of administrative data (PERSAL)

In Conclusion

In order to improve the quality of education we must decrease time away from school and classrooms. Educator leave is a national and societal issue.

In South Africa individual, school and socio-environmental conditions influence the extent of leave taking and the long term strategies to reduce the extent of leave taking are dependent on individual commitment and accountability at a local level and improved school and community conditions.

Extent of leave: Estimates for S.A.

