Recently several schools have retained Littleford & Associates to assess worldwide workload patterns, length of school day and many aspects of how they manage their income sources and expenses. Undertaking such a study requires a certain amount of “courage” because faculty could worry that it may lead to greater workload; more minutes per week; larger class size; fewer stipends; and less release time. However, the potential benefits of such a sophisticated survey far outweigh any political risks, even to a faculty. The results and revelations can be empowering. They can lead to a clearer definition of a full time job, greater equity and fairness and the creation of a more viable financial model.

One of the most intriguing highlights of these surveys that included more than forty internationally known and highly respected peer schools was the vastly varied pattern of workload for teachers. Therein lies an interesting question. **Since salaries and benefits make up 70% to 85% of the costs in schools, why are schools not paying more attention to workload patterns? Productivity seems to be a term that we use in the business context constantly but avoid in the school context.**

I. The Real Costs Associated with Workload Patterns

In the above examples, teacher work days ranged from 161 to 192. Minutes of in class teaching time per week for secondary school varied from 600 to 2500 minutes. Some schools paid teachers nothing for taking on extra curricular assignments after school, and one paid up to $15,000 a year plus reduced class loads for similar tasks. These are but just a few of the interesting and surprising findings of these surveys that point out huge workload discrepancies.

These recent studies forced the participants to count "minutes" per week actually spent teaching in the classroom. This required calculating time spent in car pool, recess and lunchroom duty; transition times for elementary school teachers; and break time while other "specials" took over. This required listing how many "specials" are offered in the elementary grades and the time given to IT, library, music, art, PE and other non-homeroom related classes. The statistical range is both fascinating and baffling. How can great schools of enrollments averaging 1000 students or more have staggering differences in workload behaviors?
Most of the Schools who participated in these surveys were International Baccalaureate Schools. The real cost of the IB model is very high. The model often requires the positions of PYP (Primary Years Program) Coordinator, MYP (Middle Years Program) Coordinator and other administrative roles. These are stipended positions that are often but not always accompanied by reduced workloads. Even in those schools without the IB, however, it is common practice for department heads and the directors of many other activities and functions to have a lower workload.

For example, if a school pays someone 80,000 USD annual salary plus $2500 for being an MYP coordinator or a department head AND reduces his or her course load from four to three classes this costs the school $2500 plus $20,000. Reducing workload while adding stipends is one of the most expensive ways to staff our academic and extracurricular programs. Seeing these true costs in black and white can lead to the important discussion of how to reduce and control them particularly when lock-step salary scales leave few variables to manipulate.

II. The Definition of a Full Time Job

Even before conducting these recent studies Littleford & Associates was becoming increasingly aware of the importance of studying workload patterns in our independent and international schools. Rarely in all of our 25 years of interviewing over 60,000 teachers individually worldwide in over 3000 schools did we have a teacher ever tell us that he or she was not overworked. Most felt underpaid as well.

At one end of the spectrum, this consultant has seen a full time job defined as five classes a day, five days a week, times 20 students in each class, plus two after school coaching assignments with no extra pay for those roles. At the other end, this consultant has observed teachers with a workload of three courses meeting a total of four times a week; one or two "preps"; no extra assignments after school, advisory, or homeroom; and freedom to come and go during the day when one does not have a class period. Teachers at both of these extremes have told this consultant that they felt overworked.

What is at the bottom of the workload issue? The definition of a full time job. In the old boarding school model a full-time job was teaching four classes; coaching two sports, serving dorm duty two to three evenings a week and every third weekend; and having an advisory group of students. As the independent school movement spread south and west in the US, it adopted the compensation patterns of public schools. Internationally the same pattern evolved. Increasingly, almost all the leaders and teachers of those schools came from the "state" sector schools in their home countries. That background or training may have been excellent but it represented a very different way of thinking about a full-time job.
Many years ago, schools decided that the norm for middle and upper day school teachers was two or three “preps” daily. Now for many middle school teachers, one prep is the norm and may be the norm as well for an upper school history teacher. But what about a foreign language teacher who is upset about having four preps? That is an unfair comparison when one fails to take into account that the middle and upper school teachers with one prep may be teaching 80 students and the foreign language teacher 35 to 40 students. This is one area where total student enrollment per teacher is relevant in a workload comparison.

Another dangerous workload pattern grew out of a desire for a more flexible schedule, such as a rotating one where teachers may meet their students for only three or four periods a week. These teachers tell me their load is “four courses” or even “five courses”, by which one might infer incorrectly that they teach these classes every day. This is why calculating minutes per week or per every two week cycle is critical.

One client school grants workload reductions of one course for activities ranging from yearbook, drama, dance and school newspaper to handling carpool. At one time this school required four classes (or courses) a day five days a week plus two “extras” at no additional income. That went by the wayside long ago as this School administration (and many others) fell down the slippery slope of negotiating with teachers nearly every new duty or task that needed to be done. How did this happen?

Expectations of a teaching professional have increased exponentially along with parental expectations of an independent or international school education. Teachers are now asked to serve on committees; help to evaluate their peers; learn and participate in curriculum mapping; and participate in open houses, for example. We have failed to differentiate between performing extra work on the one hand and giving to a chosen profession out of a desire for self-enrichment and student improvement.

Most of our teachers are fully professional and fill whatever gaps they may have in their daily schedules with related tasks in a conscientious effort to be productive and resourceful. At another recent client School all of the teachers interviewed were quite comfortable with the expectation of teaching four courses plus one extra activity such as coaching or a club. Their issue was not so much workload or absolute compensation as a lack of transparency about how compensation is delivered at this School.

III. Do These Workload Patterns Point to a Formula for Success?

What is also interesting is the relationship between schools paying higher teacher salaries and those with higher workloads. There was really no pattern in these studies. That is, strong schools
with higher workloads were paying high salaries, BUT so were lesser known schools with lower workloads. Can the schools with lower workloads paying higher salaries really justify both? Can they justify this pattern, if in terms of national or international reputation they are no better known or regarded than schools with lesser salaries and higher workloads or higher workloads and higher salaries?

What if we compared IB or AP scores of these schools? Could we conclude that low workload and high salaries automatically result in better scores? It is doubtful. More likely, one can attribute high faculty morale and higher student test scores not just to competitive salaries and reasonable workloads but to the health of the core faculty culture. Of course, the students' genetic makeup and home environment greatly affect test scores as well.

Yet it may be that some of the schools with the higher workloads (and where excellence, high tuition, and satisfied parents are the norm), may find that they have actually found the "right" long term pattern for sustainability. That is, these schools may have struck the balance between equitable expectation, distribution of workload, leadership and selfless dedication to school mission and the teaching craft.

IV. Income Areas

Another surprising outcome of the surveys above was that very few of those Schools are generating enough money from profit centers. Here are some of the key findings.

Application fees were the most common additional source of income. Eleven of the nineteen Schools in one study have such fees. The yield from them, however, varied from $1,400 to $604,000 per year.

Nine Schools reported income from facility rentals and nine from building/capital assessments. Again, the ranges were wide. Facilities rentals raised $1,790 to over $1,000,000 per year, whereas the building/capital assessment brought in from $5,000 to $5,000,000. Bus services, too, created additional sources of income for a number of Schools: $110K to nearly $3 million. Another School, however, reported a net loss from its bus service of nearly $50,000. We did not explore the fee structure and circumstances of each of these services, but unless a service is offered purely for safety reasons with no possibility of a profit, a loss should be unacceptable.

Many schools offered summer programs and after school programs. Summer programs aided the bottom line considerably: $35,000 - $1,174,190. After school programs contributed more modest amounts raising $34,000 to $210,000 annually. Re-enrollment fees, however, helped a good deal, generating $160,000 to $1,400,000 in revenue.
Several Schools also gained from food services, from $60K to over $1 million. Many Schools outsourced food services, allowing vendors to capture the proceeds rather than the School.

Many charge a technology fee which yielded an average of $500,000. Other Schools recorded a variety of other income-producing sources: one time per student or per family entry fee - $1,045,158; registration fee - $955,000; non mandatory activity costs - $955,603; adult learning - $109,613; and building fee - $2,237,125.

Only a few reported having a school store but we know from our work with other clients that an established well run store easily can provide net revenue of well over $300,000 a year for a school of 1000 or more students.

Clearly, then, some Schools are making good use of these funding sources, but the majority are missing out on these income-generators altogether. Profit centers can generate 10% or more of total income per year and about one third of that is "net".

IV. **Summary: Opportunities**

If the current economic downturn has no impact on our willingness to examine our core workload patterns, then we will have missed an historic opportunity to review the logic of our financial, hiring and workload decisions. Furthermore, unless schools find the moral and the political "courage" to examine with teachers in a frank and honest dialogue the real impact of our current workload patterns (not to mention the related field of compensation and benefit patterns), the entire question of "sustainability" remains largely unanswered.

More schools should consider seriously a workload study that compares "apples to apples" in terms of how schools use teacher time, how they pay or do not pay for extra assignments, coaching, and advisory assignments. Littleford & Associates can customize a survey such as the one described above that meets your school's budget and needs. The end product is a comprehensive and sophisticated tool that contains more detail and shows more patterns than statistics available through on line sources. It can serve as the springboard towards discussion by school leadership about real improvement in your bottom line, program delivery and even in faculty culture.

However, if the client wants to address successfully the questions that these surveys raise and if the faculty is to be open to changes that these surveys may suggest, then it wise for an objective outsider to come on site to obtain a sense of the school culture and climate, including school receptivity to change, and to assist in the presentation of the survey methodology and its key findings.

We recommend further that more schools study how to create new, and improve existing profit
centers. Collectively income from bussing, food service, school store, facilities rentals and other opportunities can throw off potentially sizeable sums to offset large commitments needed for financial aid, building improvements, professional growth and improvements in program and faculty compensation.

John Littleford
Senior Partner