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and Efficacy in Jamaica
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A Day in a
Jamaican Teacher's Life**

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Advancing Educational Transformation in Jamaica



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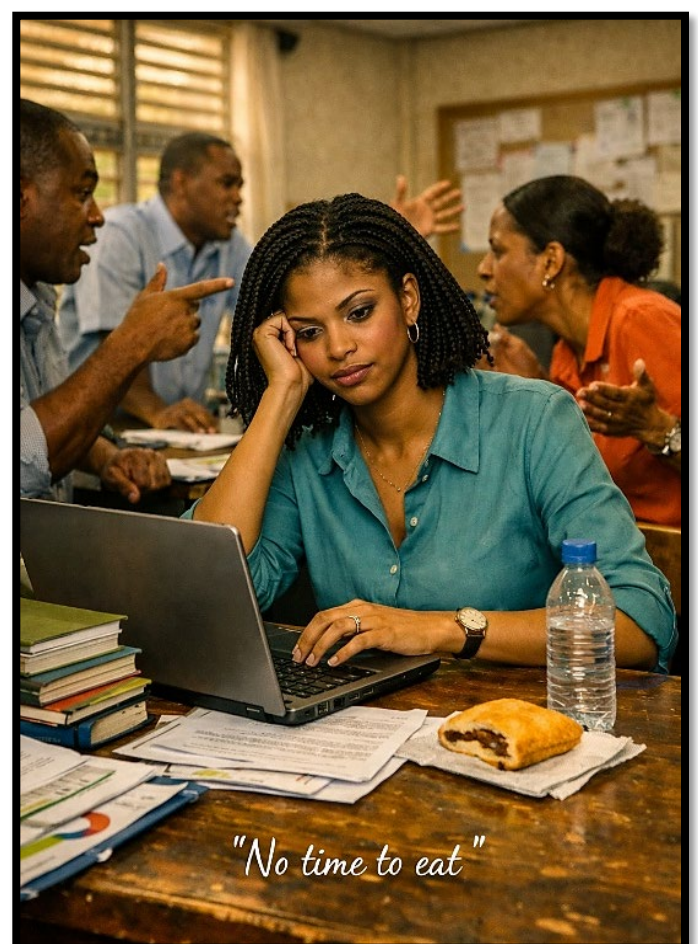


Promoting Educator Agency and Efficacy in Jamaica Protecting 'Teacher Time': A Day in a Jamaican Teacher's Life

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At the heart of Jamaica's education system are its teachers and lecturers, whose professional agency and self-efficacy are fundamental to student success. Yet increasing workloads and administrative demands continue to erode one of their most valuable resources—teacher time. As time for planning, reflection, collaboration, and professional learning diminishes, so too does educators' confidence in their ability to influence student learning and exercise professional judgment. How can protecting teacher time enhance educators' well-being, preserve their health, and strengthen their capacity to shape the nation's future?

Teacher self-efficacy refers to educators' confidence in their ability to positively influence student learning and behaviour. This confidence is strengthened when teachers have sufficient time to plan meaningful lessons, differentiate instruction, assess learning, and reflect on their practice. Similarly, educator agency - the capacity to make informed decisions about teaching and learning, depends on having the time and autonomy to innovate, collaborate, and respond to students' needs. When teacher time is consumed by excessive administrative demands, both self-efficacy and professional agency are diminished, limiting educators' ability to teach creatively, respond effectively to learners, and sustain meaningful educational improvement.



The Challenge: The Evidence of Work Intensification

A primary barrier to educator agency and self-efficacy in Jamaica is work intensification. Driven by technological and organizational changes, it is characterized by an increased volume of work, additional responsibilities, a faster pace, longer working hours, and limited resources. During regional conferences and national workshops, colleagues consistently voice similar concerns. One common refrain is, *"We receive at least twenty emails daily and struggle to stick to schedules amid constant requests for data from supervisors and governing organizations."*

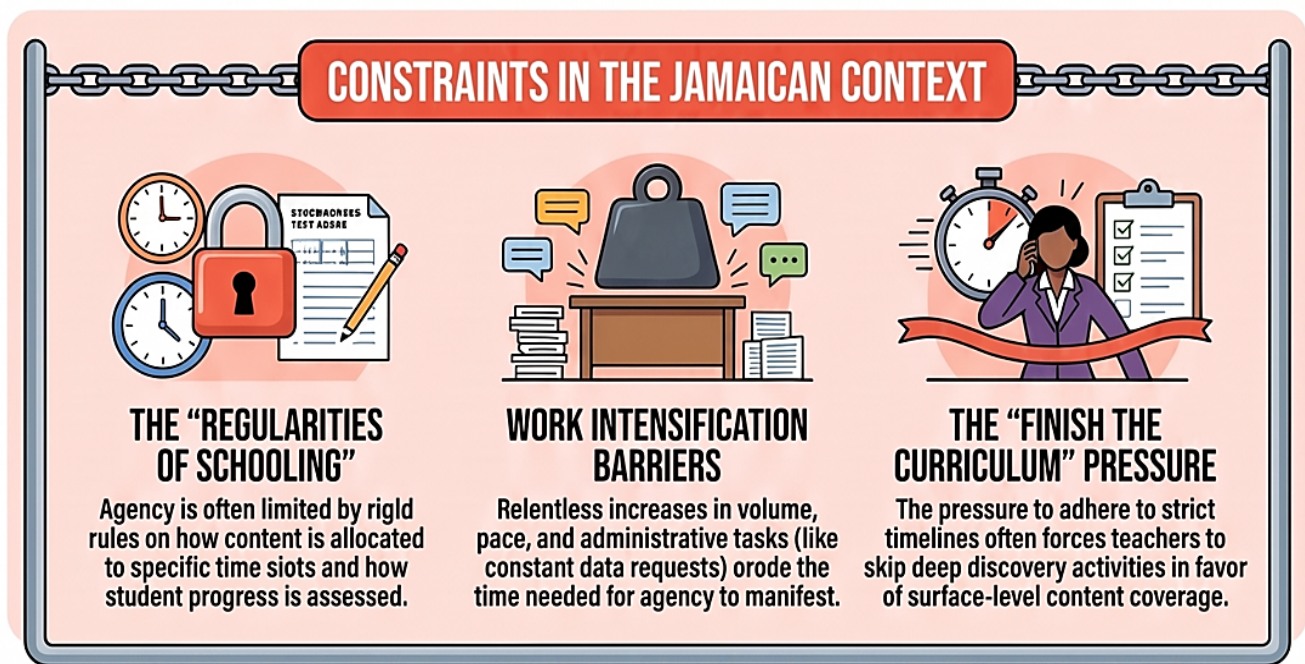
Research on Jamaican schools identifies inclusion training and a supportive school climate as key predictors of teacher self-efficacy. Educators who experience administrative collegiality and have access to adequate resources report greater confidence in their ability to support student learning. However, many teachers work in environments marked by limited resources. Principals and Grade Coordinators often engage in entrepreneurial leadership: organizing fundraisers to purchase basic supplies or support student welfare programmes. While commendable, these additional responsibilities consume valuable teacher time, contributing to exhaustion, frustration, and reduced confidence in their ability to positively influence student outcomes.

The struggle is real. One colleague called me late one evening and broke down in tears.



“Do you think it’s too late for me to switch to law or nursing?” she said. “I’ve been teaching for over 15 years, and it really seems like I’m not getting a chance to actually teach. After spending the midterm break to mark the test papers and prepare the lessons plans for the first week to submit by the deadline, I didn’t get to teach the lessons the way I wanted at all It’s too much. I had to attend two ‘emergency meetings’ in one day, leaving my students to read through and complete the activities by themselves. Then I was asked to collate some data for the entire grade the following day because we got an e-mail that we needed to send the information the Ministry of Education by the end of the day. I didn’t get to do the discovery activities and lead the class discussions to help my student to fully understand the concepts at all. I had to move on to the next topic with the other teachers in the grade, because we have to finish the curriculum. I have to be a committee meeting in my lunch time or I am schedules to sell ice cream so that we can buy a projector for our grade. I want to help with fundraisers, but when I suggest that we do some things early in the mornings or after school instead of our lunch time, I’m treated like I committed a crime”.

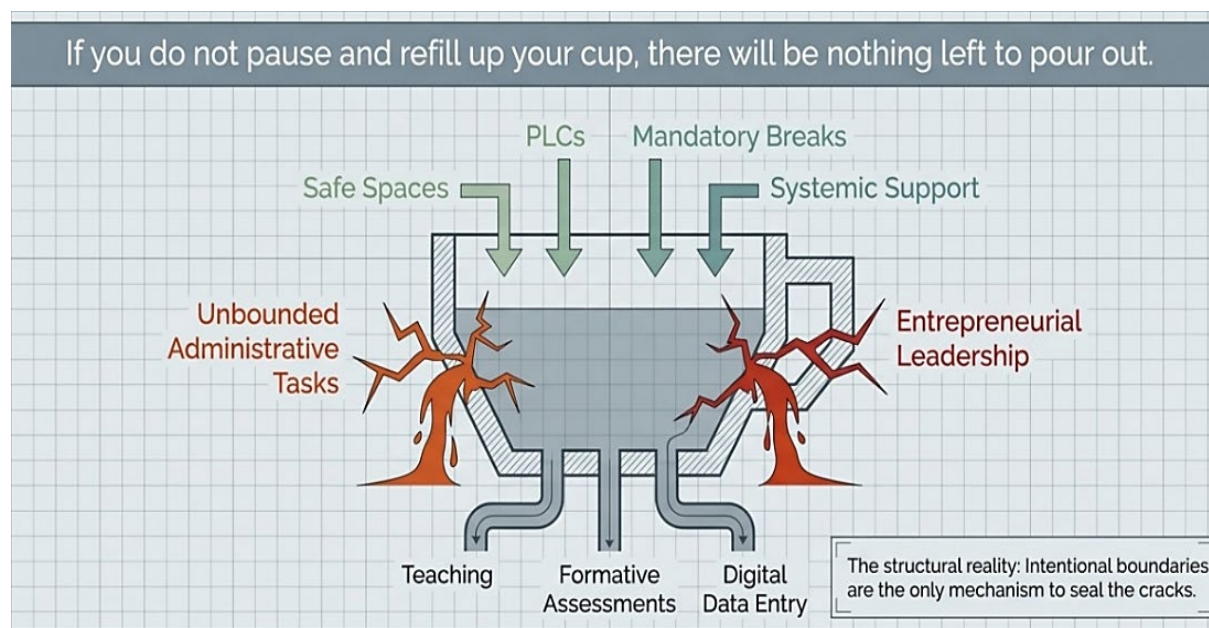
Her plight mirrored my own experiences. Despite more than 22 years in the teaching profession, I am embarrassed to admit that I collapsed at work on several occasions due to work-related stress. I also experienced frequent crying spells, even during professional meetings, as I often felt overwhelmed and hopeless. Over time, however, I learned that it is healthier to share feelings of anxiety than to bottle them up simply to “save face” or pretend that everything is manageable. The relentless nature of work intensification in Jamaica has contributed to fatigue, anxiety, hypertension, and other occupational well-being challenges. Many educators report having no downtime, working through lunch breaks, weekends, and even school holidays. This chronic stress often leads to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and diminished motivation. Compounding the problem is the persistent stigma surrounding mental health in Jamaica, which discourages many educators from seeking the support they need.



Lessons Learnt

In the last three years, eight of my colleagues have passed away-three at my current workplace and five from previous institutions. None had reached the age of 55; the youngest was just 44 and was a close friend. We had shared countless conversations about our concerns, professional goals, dreams, and aspirations. Some had young children and spouses, while others cared for elderly relatives. All died from illness. Some were too busy to eat properly or too stressed to sleep well. Three continued marking papers and completing report cards from their hospital beds because of a "cultured" mindset that being ill meant being “useless.” These losses shook me deeply and forced me to re-evaluate how I manage my teacher time.

I began reflecting on my health, life priorities, professional goals, and the dreams my husband and I shared when we first met. I realized that these deserved the same place in my schedule as my professional responsibilities if I wanted a sustainable and fulfilling teaching career. My mother once told me, “If you do not pause and refill up your cup, there will be nothing left to pour out.” Those words have stayed with me. Self-care does not mean we are selfish; it means teachers have the right to a wholesome life, just like anyone else.



We all have control over our own time. Yes, we are the ones who choose how to spend each second of each day. Whenever I find myself spending hours on tasks that leave me anxious, I now stop and ask: “To what end? What am I really achieving here? What is the actual return or outcome of all of this? Who will it really benefit? Is it worth my health, personal time with my family? How am I even treated when all this work is done?”

Systemic Mental Health Support

Protecting teacher time also requires creating “safe spaces” where educators can seek professional support without fear of social stigma. Many teachers hesitate to seek help for stress or anxiety because they fear being labelled “mad” or “head nuh good.” As a result, they often rely solely on individual coping strategies instead of accessing the systemic support available. Protecting teacher time must therefore include confidential mental health services that support the whole person, not just professional performance. Unfortunately, many school-based resources remain underutilized because of concerns about “confidentiality” and “how we will be perceived,” and the misconception that asking for help signals weakness or incompetence.



My experience has shown the opposite. A few years ago, I accepted a recommendation to participate in mediation with a professional counsellor to address recurring conflicts with colleagues. The situation had left me with sleepless nights, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. The counsellor was both caring and objective, helping those involved reflect on our actions, rebuild relationships, and work toward solution-focused outcomes. I later continued with individual counselling sessions, where I was able to release pent-up anger and confusion while receiving evidence-based guidance on my mental well-being. That experience became a turning point, allowing me to develop a realistic plan to gradually release both real and perceived burdens. It marked the beginning of my journey toward intentionally protecting my teacher time.

Practical Ways to Protect your Teacher Time

To protect our time and maintain professional efficacy, we must employ a combination of systemic structural shifts, collaborative practices, and intentional personal boundaries.

➔ Reconfiguring Administrative Roles

If we truly assess the volume of paperwork teachers are often drowned in, we will unanimously agree that it is another full-time job. Seriously—from reviewing current educational research, designing instructional activities, aligning 8 to 15 lesson plans weekly with the NSC and 21st-century requirements, creating tests and authentic assessments, to providing meaningful feedback. There is simply not enough time. The expectation of giving individual feedback to every one of 20 to 45 students is, quite honestly, impossible.

The 4Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—are not only for our students; they should also help us become more efficient, innovative, and wholesome educators. The key is to tap into the resources we already have, use the legal frameworks that protect us, and give ourselves room to actually enjoy the process of moulding young innovators.

Structural changes, such as assigning more managerial responsibilities to vice-principals and department heads, would allow lead educators to focus on instructional leadership rather than administrative compliance. Likewise, middle managers need protected time to support teacher development, monitor implementation, and engage in meaningful evaluation that informs impactful, data-driven decisions.

➔ Tailor Your Support System

Protecting teacher time also means making better use of the support around you. Find out to what extent your administrative staff can assist. Then look beyond the school. Do you have one or two parents, past students, relatives, community members, or even your own students who have the skills and are willing to help within their capacity? Reach out to them. You may be pleasantly surprised by the positive responses and the wealth of resources you can tap into. Likewise, when projects or professional deadlines arise, don't try to do everything alone. Reach out to former classmates, colleagues from other schools, or educators you have met along the way. They may offer advice, lend a helping hand, or simply point you in the right direction.

➔ Capitalize on the Power of Partnerships

Collaboration is one of the most effective ways to reduce workload and prevent burnout. Through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers can share ideas, co-develop lesson plans, and create assessment tools together. Problem-solving is always easier when shared than when carried by one person. One experience that stayed with me came from a school where my Grade Coordinator introduced a delegated lesson-planning system. Teachers with greater expertise prepared lesson plans for specific subject areas and shared them at least three days before submission. The rest of us reviewed the plans, adapted them to meet the needs of our classes, and added our own creativity.

This approach significantly reduced our workload while allowing us to learn from one another. Although some plans were not always shared on time, tools such as Google Docs now make collaboration much easier by allowing teachers to work on shared drafts simultaneously. The same approach can be used for assessment planning. Saving these shared resources also provides valuable references for future use, especially for teachers who are new to a grade level.



➔ Advocate for Transparency of Workload Distribution

Each staff member should have a clear description of the core tasks for which they are responsible. In schools, workloads are often interconnected, with one person's output becoming another person's input. When deadlines are missed, it creates a ripple effect of frustration and delays for everyone else. Unfortunately, many teachers end up completing administrative tasks that should be handled by other staff members, often without realizing it. Adding these responsibilities to an already full workload is a dangerous pathway to burnout and staff demoralization. Greater transparency about roles, responsibilities, and timelines would make it easier to identify where support or reconfiguration is needed. It would also encourage professional accountability, constructive dialogue, and the co-creation of systems that help everyone achieve both individual and collective goals.

➔ Create a Burnout Prevention Formula with your Required Workload

First, become familiar with the education regulations and policies that govern your institution, whether at the early childhood, primary, secondary, or tertiary level. Teachers should also be aware of the broader labour laws that protect them. According to the National Labour Standards, the standard maximum workweek for a full-time employee in Jamaica is 40 hours before overtime applies (National Minimum Wage Amendment Order, 2026). While teachers may fall within this limit on paper, the reality is often very different.

All Jamaican teachers should also be familiar with The Education Regulations (1980), particularly Regulation 9, which defines teaching hours, the school day, mandatory breaks, and excludes Saturdays and Sundays from the school week. Educators in post-secondary institutions should likewise review the workload guidelines that govern their specific roles. For example, the JBTE (2024) prescribes different weekly contact hours based on academic rank, recognizing that leadership and research responsibilities require additional time.

One strategy I have found helpful is drafting a personal estimated workload timetable within a healthy 40-hour workweek. Schedule your core responsibilities first, using your required contact hours as the foundation. Then add additional tasks assigned by your supervisor. Colour-coding contact hours and task categories makes it much easier to monitor how your time is being used and to identify when your workload has become unrealistic. For example:

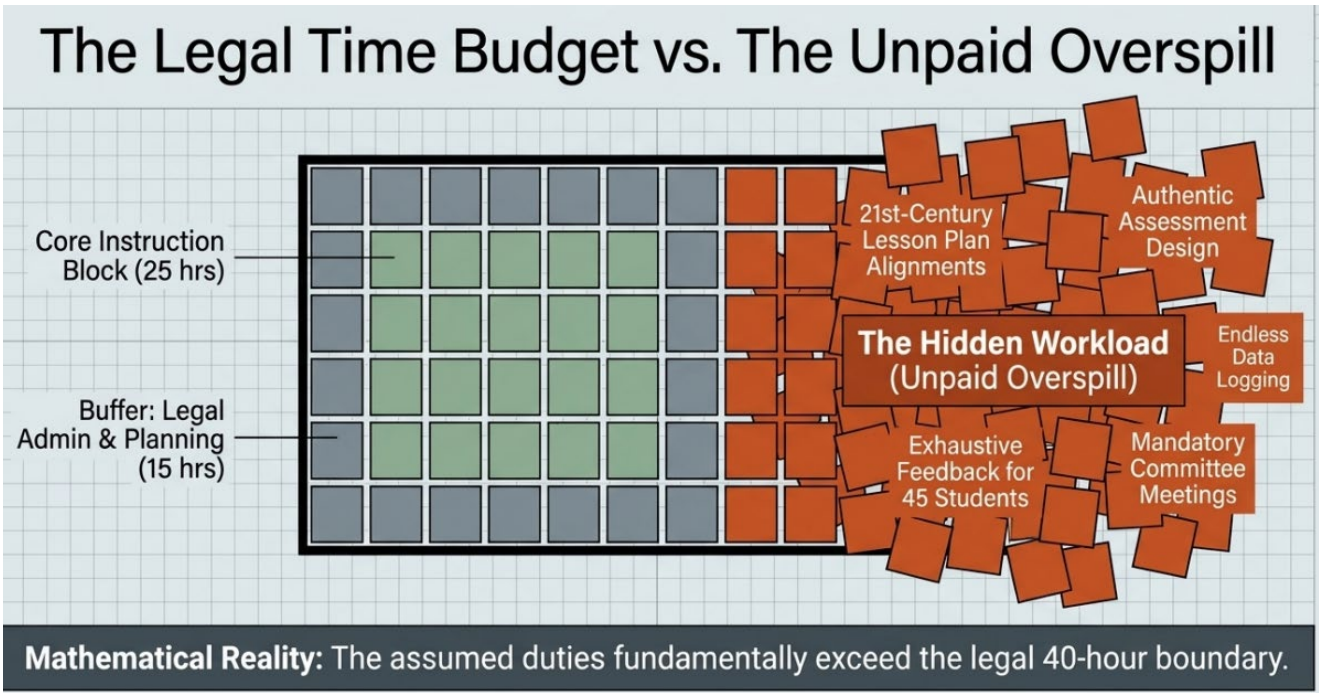
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00: 9:00	Course 1	Emails Digital Data Entry/ Practicum Supervision Duties	Research Related Activities Meetings and Coaching Sessions	Student Advisement	Course 5
9:00- 10:00				Meetings Department/ Faculty/Staff	
10:00 – 11:00					
11:00 – 12:00	Emails Digital Data Entry/ Student Consultation	Special Committee Meetings/Events			Emails Digital Data Entry/ Practicum Supervision Duties
12:00 – 1:00	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1:00 -2:00	Grading Assessments	Course 3	Grading Assessments	Clubs Special Committee Meetings/Events	Grading Assessments
2:00 – 3:00					Planning
3:00 – 4:00	Planning		Planning	Planning	
Evening Classes 5:00- 8:00 p.m.	Course 2		Course 4		

Figure 1 Ideal Distribution of Estimated Workload – Post- Secondary/Tertiary

Action Plan: How to Execute your Estimated Workload Formula

Cap Your Contact Time (Target: 18-22 Hours): Stick to the legal limits: Ensure your schedule does not exceed the legal hours without fair compensation.

Guard your breaks:
Avoid filling your lunch breaks with meetings and consultations on a regular basis. Where you are required to supervise students, ensure that your supervisors make arrangements for you to be relieved. Treat this time as a *mandatory cognitive reset*.



Streamline Lesson Planning (Target: 5 Hours)

Embrace the 80/20 rule: Spend 80% of your time tailoring delivery and only 20% creating materials.

Leverage digital tools: Use trusted educational platforms and basic AI assistants to draft your initial lesson outlines, syllabus breakdowns, and content ideas. This can save you up to 5 hours per week.

Share resources: Build a shared folder with department peers to pool lesson plans and worksheets instead of starting from a blank template every term/semester.

Grade Smarter (Target: 5 Hours):

You do not need to assign a heavy grade to every single piece of paper. Use quick, non-graded formative checks (like exit tickets) to gauge learning.

Implement peer-marking: Have students swap papers to check objective answers during class. This offers them immediate feedback while clearing your desk.

Use Single-Point Rubrics:

Avoid writing lengthy individual comments. Use a simple rubric to highlight strengths and areas for improvement quickly.

Manage Administrative Tasks (Target: 6-8 Hours):

Timebox your paperwork: Set a strict timer for logging marks or completing register work. When the timer goes off, step away.

Optimize interactions:

Focus parent/student queries and staff conversations to address priority points.

Ask for time to consider new tasks:

Before accepting new tasks, analyse your workload draft. There may be times where you may have to decline additional duties to prevent 'burn out'. In some cases, you may also have to defend the reason you are declining by sharing your workload draft with your supervisors.

Choose additional tasks that align with your professional objectives. This allows you to develop individual goals while contributing to department/faculty/institutional priority targets.



Managing Digital Boundaries

Technological advancement has created a state of constant accessibility via email and WhatsApp, blurring the lines between personal and professional life. To protect professional space, educators should:

Designate Specific Email Times:

Instead of checking messages continuously, assign limited, specific time blocks during your workday for email correspondence.

Silence Work Notifications:

Turn off work-related notifications, such as those from WhatsApp or email, after a certain hour in the evening to maintain a clear line between your professional and personal life.

Implement the 42% Recovery Rule:

Preventing physical and mental burnout requires dedicating roughly 42% of the day or about 10 hours to physiological rest and decompression (Nagaski & Nagoski, 2019). Ensure you are spending approximately 10 hours a day (including sleep) completely away from work to rest, disconnect, and pursue hobbies. True protection of teacher time requires acknowledging that downtime periods without physical or mental work, is an inherent necessity for restoring energy and recovering from daily stress. Educators must proactively monitor their own energy and listen to physical signals of fatigue to prevent the chronic stress that leads to hypertension and burnout.

Promoting educator agency and efficacy in Jamaica is not merely a pedagogical concern but a national imperative for sustainable development. The current "innovation deficit" in the education system is symptomatic of a reaching workforce that is overworked, under-resourced, unhealthy and demoralized. Protecting 'teacher time' is the essential first step in reversing this trend. By creating an enabling environment that prioritizes the occupational well-being of educators and grants them the autonomy to act as facilitators of deep learning, Jamaica can cultivate a generation of reflective, innovative, and adaptable citizens. Success will require a synergistic effort from the governing bodies, school boards, and the educators themselves to reclaim the professional space necessary for transformative education. Ultimately, protecting 'teacher time' is achieved when we exercise professional agency, translating our situational power into strategies that prioritize deep, reflective learning while decreasing administrative and "entrepreneurial" distractions.

Are you enjoying being a teacher? Have you been balancing your health, sleep and happiness, amidst the academic and administrative demands of being an educator? What about those personal professional goals? Have you completed that book, that course, that community project? OR. Have you been asking yourself....where does the time go? How am I to accomplish my goals with all these deadlines, lesson plans, meetings and reports?

BUT...you CAN. By protecting your 'Teacher Time'.



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