



A Human Sciences Research Council (HRC) study has found that 40 000 of the country's estimated 400 000 educators in the public system are absent from school every day.

On average, every teacher is absent between 20 and 24 days a year, of which only 6 days are due to official school business. The main reasons cited for teacherless classrooms include sick leave, urgent private matters and family responsibilities. The South African

Democratic Teachers' Union however says the heavy workload and further studies often lead to extra days being put in.

The HSRC says it is concerned about official school duties eating away at actual class time. The HRC's Dr. Vijay Reddy says: "I didn't expect that number of days for teachers to be taken away from a classroom and also what surprised me was that if I look at the rural smaller schools, the number of times the principal has to leave the school to go to some meetings, that means there's once again a loss of performing one's duty in the school itself."

Also revealed is that teachers mostly take 1 to 2 days discretionary leave for which they don't have to provide a medical certificate. Mondays and Fridays are the most popular days for taking off.

"We have seen that those days there's a far higher occurrence of leave which suggests that there might be abuse in the system," says Dr Reddy.

The HSRC has advised that absent days for official duties be reduced and that systems be improved to monitor leave better.