

Teachers the ones 'bunking'

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TEACHERS are creating unofficial long weekends for themselves, with Mondays and Fridays being the most popular days for them to take "sick leave".

This was one of the findings of research by the Human Sciences Research Council on leave taken by teachers at public schools.

The report on the research, commissioned by the Department of Basic Education last year, said the council's "conservative optimistic estimate is that the educator leave ratio for South Africa is 10% to 12%".

This means that, on any given day, between 10% and 12% of teachers — 40 000 in total — will be away from school on leave, ostensibly because of sickness, urgent private matters, family responsibilities or official duties.

The report estimates that between 20 days and 24 days of teaching time are lost per teacher per year, with a quarter of this leave being taken for official duties, such as meetings and training.

Vijay Reddy, the council's executive director of education and skills development, said the percentages were estimates based on various studies, as well as on research by the Human Sciences Research Council team at 50 schools around the country.

"I suppose it's no surprise. Mondays and Fridays are the most popular days [for taking leave]," which, she said, suggested "some level of abuse".

Reddy said most of this leave was "discretionary leave for which you don't have to

produce a medical certificate".

"Principals need to address this at an administrative level," she said.

By law, teachers are entitled to 36 days of leave in three years. This does not include the more than 100 days of school holidays when

they are not teaching.

Teachers are required to submit a written request for time off, but Reddy said there was a "vast level of under-recording of leave".

The report shows that South Africa has a much higher teachers' leave ratio than "high-

income countries" such as Australia, the UK, Canada and the US, which have leave ratios of between 3% and 6%.

But South Africa outperforms "low-income nations" such as Kenya, Uganda, India, Zambia and Ecuador in this respect.

