

# Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

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## Discussion Summary and Recommendations, December 4 - 6, 2017

### Assessment Policy: Consultation

*Goals:* Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) staff presented a consultation plan to inform a new student assessment policy. Consultation goals include

- building understanding of the policy impacts, research and the perspectives of different stakeholders
- building consensus on issues such as deadlines, use of zeroes, exam exemptions, retention and social promotion (“no fail”), and academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism)
- identifying areas for provincial direction as well as regional- or school-level flexibility

Council members again stressed the need for ensuring that the assessment policy and practices support honest and clear communications. Students and their parents need to understand – in plain language, not in education jargon – how well students are, or are not, doing.

Council members said some teachers feel pressured to change marks or push students along, even if the students have not met the outcomes. If students are not prepared for success in life, at work, or post-secondary, teachers fear they are failing them. In a nutshell, educational philosophy and research do not always align with preferred practice and lived experience. Consultation must address this.

An operational guide will also be required. This should be developed in consultation with school boards.

*Stakeholders:* Consultations will involve teachers, including the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) and Council to Improve Classroom Conditions; administrators, led by the Principals’ Forum; and other school staff. Other groups include parents and school advisory councils/home and school associations; students (including those from traditionally under-represented and marginalized groups); school board superintendents and staff; and experts, such as behavioural psychologists.

Post-secondary educators and employers, through the Business Education Council, will also be consulted on issues like deadlines and academic integrity, as policy and practices on these issues affect students’ readiness for college, university and work. Council asked that young adults who either failed or were socially promoted would also be consulted about how that experience affected them.

*Timing:* Council recognized the need to balance the value of adequate consultation with the need to relieve teachers of some of the frustration and workload related to these issues. They also recognized that a lot of consultation and reviews are happening now, some of which could affect this policy, particularly the Commission on Inclusive Education report due in March.

Council asked EECD to report back in January on ways to deal with the highest priority issues for teachers, such as deadlines and use of zeroes, before the next school year begins, either outside of policy, or as part of a phased or pilot approach.

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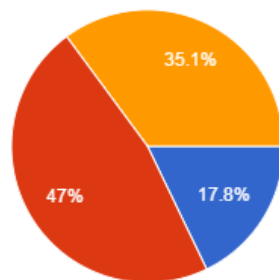
## Report Cards

EECD shared results of the Grade 4 – 6 report card survey. Responses indicate that teachers want change – only 17.8 per cent of teachers in the English school boards and no teachers in the CSAP like what they have now. Opinion is mixed on whether the report card should be integrated (like in P-3 which reports on the learner profile, language arts and math) or report on all subjects, but with no comments except on the learner profile, in language arts and in math.

### English School Board Survey Results

#### I would like to see the Grade 4–6 report card:

538 responses

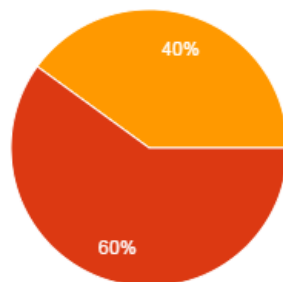


- Report on the Learner Profile and all subjects, the same as now.
- Report on the Learner Profile, Language Arts and Mathematics only, using the A-D grade scale and comments. This would be the same as the current P-3 template.
- Report on the Learner Profile, Language Arts and Mathematics using the A-D grade scale and comments and report all other subjects using the developmental scale with no comments.

### CSAP Survey Results

#### J'aimerais voir dans le bulletin de la 4<sup>e</sup> à la 6<sup>e</sup> année les éléments suivants :

20 responses



- notes sur le profil de l'apprenant et sur toutes les matières, comme maintenant
- notes sur le profil de l'apprenant et sur le français et les mathématiques uniquement, avec l'échelle de A à D et les commentaires, comme dans le bulletin scolaire actuel de M à 3.
- notes sur le profil de l'apprenant et sur le français et les mathématiques uniquement, avec l'échelle de A à D et les commentaires, et notes sur toutes les autres matières avec l'échelle axée sur le développement, sans commentaires.

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Teachers commented on issues including the frequency and timing of elementary report cards, letter grades versus the developmental code, the learner profile, and comment writing. EECD is analyzing all report card results, and will be sharing with school boards and schools in the new year.

Council wants to dedicate more time to discussing report cards at all levels at future meetings. Report cards must also be considered as part of the assessment policy development.

### Paperwork, Data Entry and Administrative Burden

Last year, EECD collected an inventory from all school boards on data entry and reporting requirements. The council working group met to review this information and determined that the information does not reflect all the paperwork and administrative demands placed on teachers.

| Recommendation   | Rationale  | Additional Comments  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Problem:</b> Teachers spend too much time on paperwork and administrative tasks, taking away from their time to teach.</p>   |  |  |
| <p>Complete the inventory of paperwork, data entry, and administrative tasks by asking teachers about the specific demands on them. Finalize the inventory with school board superintendents and directors.</p>  | <p>Recommendations for streamlining should be based on a complete and accurate inventory. This will also support greater consistency among boards.</p> | <p>The council working group will develop a comprehensive list of categories to discuss with teachers. Council will consult first with teachers who volunteered to help with streamlining paperwork, data entry and administrative burden.</p> |
| <p>Identify ways to streamline the administrative burden, based on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the purpose of the work clear?</li> <li>• Is the work redundant or unnecessary?</li> <li>• Can the work be streamlined?</li> <li>• Could others in the school play a role in completing the work?</li> </ul> | <p>If teachers spend less time on administrative tasks, they will have more time to work with students.</p>  | <p>As above.</p>   |

Another demand on teachers' time is to respond to requests from outside agencies to participate in research studies. All boards have a senior staff member or committee to review those requests, and school boards will continue their usual practice.

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| Recommendation   | Rationale   | Additional Comments  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Problem:</b> Criteria and responses to requests for schools to participate in research studies may differ from board to board.  |   |  |
| Provide boards with consistent criteria to minimize the number of demands that are made on school administrators and teachers.   | This will reduce interruptions to teaching and learning.  | EECD will provide criteria to boards, and use the same criteria for requests received by government. |
| Criteria should generally exclude the following months for research studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>September and June in all schools</li> <li>September, January, February and June for high schools</li> </ul> | These are already extremely busy months for teachers and administrators.                                      | As above.  |
| Give all schools the opportunity to decline participation.   | Principals, in consultation with teachers, are in the best position to understand the impact on their school. | As above.  |
| Require that a research report go back to the participating school.  | If a school takes the time to participate, they should receive a report to inform teaching and learning.      | As above.  |

Government has received a request to continue participating in the national Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study. Results inform public policy in areas including health education, SchoolsPlus, and physical education. Council emphasized the need for the department to adhere to the criteria in the recommendations above to guide participation in the survey, particularly that participation be optional for schools and teachers.

### TIENET and Ask the User

The Ask the User team is in the final stages of its work that could lead, over time, to more than 40 changes to TIENET to remove frustration and save time for teachers. Those changes were detailed in the November Discussion Summary and Recommendations ( <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/classroomcouncil> ).

Council emphasized the need to move forward with whatever changes are possible, as soon as possible. At the same time, Council cautioned that major changes mid-year can be disruptive to teachers. Council advised that any changes that are planned for January should happen at the end of the month to align with the end of the semester for high schools, and to give time for effective communications.

Some changes can be made in January, without causing significant disruptions, that will begin reducing clicks and data entry. These changes will be supported by a full communications plan.

Discussions are also under way with the TIENET vendor on more significant changes that should occur in September. Other changes are expected to come from the Commission on Inclusive Education report.

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Along with TIENET system and process changes, this work has also led to a new way to develop and introduce changes. Specifically, users in schools, school boards and the department have worked together on finalizing the changes to the TIENET system and practices. Participants in the workshops this fall have found the experience of having everyone in the same room, tackling the same problem from a variety of perspectives, very positive. One more webinar workshop will be held in December to validate the changes for the new year, which will then be communicated in an Ask the User final report, shared with teachers and all TIENET users.

Teachers and other TIENET users will have more opportunities throughout the winter to test and validate proposed changes for the fall. While this takes more time, this allows users to assess if the proposed changes or solutions are the right ones, and that they do not introduce a new set of challenges.

The Ask the User report will also include recommendations on other priorities and concerns teachers identified. Some recommendations – like the reviews of the Program Planning Process, policies and standardization of practices, and class composition, are already being dealt with by the Commission on Inclusive Education. Other recommendations relate to better training and ongoing support for TIENET users, system access rights to reduce workarounds and ensure privacy, and ways to support teacher collaboration and use of data to support decision-making.

EECD will review all recommendations, identify those items that require funding, and develop a roadmap for change that aligns with any changes that take place resulting from other work, such as discussions with the TIENET vendor and the pending report of the Commission on Inclusive Education.

### Attendance Updates

*Attendance Policy:* As indicated when the attendance policy was released, EECD is accepting feedback throughout the year. Based on feedback to date, the department is providing additional information and clarifying issues.

For example, principals may delegate their responsibilities relating to monitoring attendance and responding to attendance issues to vice-principals, teachers, or other appropriate staff. However, principals may not delegate decisions related to loss of credit to other staff.

An updated FAQ reiterates that teachers are not required to provide materials to students in advance of a planned absence. The full FAQ can be found at <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/student-attendance-and-engagement-policy>.

Possible changes to PowerSchool codes were also discussed:

- Some schools have asked to create a Leave Early code.
- In some boards, teachers can only see their own Attendance Notes. Some teachers want to be able to view Attendance Notes entered by others when they teach the same students.
- Principals have asked to be able to use the SC (special circumstances) code for instances such as when school is open but buses are not running. Council is not opposed to principals having a code for limited circumstances; however, they ask that it be a different code so it is used differently than the SC code was used in the past.

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Council will be updated in January on plans for an independent evaluation for the attendance policy and the attendance support pilot.

*Attendance Support Workers:* School boards completed their selection of families of schools, or feeder systems, to participate in the pilot. In total, 14 attendance workers will support 66 schools across the province. All school boards have now posted the job descriptions, with all competitions closing by December 12. EECD is working with school boards on a plan for training and support.

*Promotional Materials:* Council endorsed creative work for social media posts and posters that will be shared with schools in the new year, based on the concept that suggests class isn't the same when students are missing. An Every Day Counts wordmark (below) has also been created for schools, and an online toolkit will also be available, including stats and facts, newsletter inserts, practical tips for parents, and an activity guide.



## Math Strategy

The province's current math strategy ends in 2018. EECD staff presented the new math strategy leading to 2022 for Council's information. By 2022, the goal is to improve overall mathematics achievement by five per cent for all students, as well as to focus on narrowing the achievement gap for African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal learners through culturally responsive teaching and math intervention strategies.

Elements of the strategy include:

- building capacity for high quality teaching in math
- implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy
- supporting leadership and a growth mindset
- providing students with a full range of mathematics instruction and assessment in grades P-12
- monitoring and tracking mathematics development of all students and providing timely support as needed
- establishing a systematic response to provincial assessment data
- using technologies, as appropriate, to help with learning in all grade levels

Strong partnerships with families and community groups – and partnerships across government, school boards and universities – are also needed and guardians to support student success in math.

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## Council Updates

*Change in Co-Chair:* Council members thanked EECD Deputy Minister Sandra McKenzie, who is retiring this month. A new deputy minister is now being recruited, and will join Council as co-chair, once appointed.

*Availability of Substitute Teachers:* Council members continue to share concerns about the availability of substitutes. They are concerned that the situation is about to get worse, as retired teachers are generally less likely to substitute after 69.5 days. In the short-term, school boards are responding in a variety of ways. For example, two school boards (CSAP and Tri-County) have agreements with EECD and the NSTU locals on ways to broaden the substitute pool beyond certified teachers, when qualified teachers are unavailable. Halifax is the third board working to finalize such an agreement. Boards are also working with universities on recruiting this year's graduates. EECD is working with universities and the NSTU on issues such as supply, demand and recruitment to identify a long-term solution to this issue.

*Math Interventionists:* Some Council members are hearing from teachers who appreciate the help math interventionists are providing to students; however, some teachers are concerned about the impact of pulling students out of classes other than math, particularly language arts. The math interventionists are being piloted, and Council asked that this feedback be considered.

*Provincial Sports Organizations:* The deputy minister updated Council on her meetings about scheduling school sports outside of school time as much as possible. To date, she has met with: the Nova Scotia School Athletics Federation (NSSAF); Sport Nova Scotia; Soccer Nova Scotia; Hockey Nova Scotia; Basketball Nova Scotia; and the MicMac Rowing Club. The groups agreed that they can help reduce absenteeism related to sport, and can promote understanding of the policy, as well as resources to help students stay connected to their learning (the Nova Scotia Homework Hub, G-Suite/Google Applications for Education, etc.).

A meeting is also being arranged between the sports organizations and the Principals' Forum. Meetings with Dance Nova Scotia and production companies that organize dance competitions will also occur.

Council members also shared concerns they are hearing about NSSAF. For example, questions about provincial playoffs were raised. In one case, a last-minute scheduling change meant students and teachers missed two days of school instead of one. The deputy indicated she would share letters that have been received and ask staff to follow up directly with NSSAF.

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*Principals' Forum and Marking Days:* The Principals' Forum shared concerns about the change in marking days, particularly that administrators may not be able to complete the year-end work without additional days at the end of June. The deputy minister has asked the Forum to gather more information on what work needs to be completed at year-end; who should be doing that work; and differences in impact of the change for schools with different grade levels (elementary, junior high/middle, high) and in different parts of the province. Council co-chairs both talked about the number of non-classroom days available for a variety of administrative and organizational purposes, as well as marking and professional development. Discussions should occur in the new year on ways to manage these days so necessary work in June gets done without losing class time and adding more work for teachers and administrators.

*Teacher Engagement, Council Communications:* Some teacher Council members are not yet able to share information with and receive feedback from teachers in their board. The deputy said superintendents support this request, and are working on it. A status report on all Council recommendations will be posted at <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/classroomcouncil> before the December break.

### Next Meeting

The next meeting is January 8 – 10.