

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Meeting Discussion Summary and Recommendations March 5 - 7, 2018

Public School Program (PSP)

The PSP establishes the philosophy and framework for public education in Nova Scotia. It is not an operational document, but instead:

- describes the core vision and principles of public education
- describes the broad concepts of learning, teaching and assessment in the province
- gives a broad description of programming, assessment and communication
- provides links to key documents that support and give direction (operational details)

The current PSP is out of date and does not reflect the reality of today's classrooms. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) has engaged a consultant to build on research and consult teachers, parents and others on how to update the PSP. This work began in 2015.

As part of the consultation, Council received a presentation on the scope of the current work and next steps. Along with updating the PSP, unique and promising practices for high school are being identified, such as: high school pathways; graduation requirements; the high school credit system; and teaching, learning, programming and curriculum.

The consultant has had initial meetings with teachers, principals, students, parents through School Advisory Councils, and school board and department staff. At this stage, the consultant is meeting with groups on a draft. These meetings are expected to continue to the end of May.

Groups, including Council, are being asked to provide feedback on:

- the document format
- the guiding statement and principles
- beliefs and values for our public schools
- how to support student success
- early childhood and elementary programs
- secondary education

Council endorsed the idea of updating the PSP. They also supported many of the principles and ideas presented within the draft. However, they do not feel they had adequate time to fully understand the implications of some of the changes being promoted, particularly for high school. Council encouraged careful attention to implementation, with teacher involvement, to ensure teacher workload does not increase.

The consultant said dates for the launch of the PSP have not been confirmed.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
<p>Problem: The existing PSP is outdated and should be updated; however, some teachers have not yet had adequate opportunity to help shape the document or understand how the PSP aligns with other work under way to support student success.</p>		
<p>Continue consulting teachers and others in education on a new PSP. Hold finalization and release of the PSP until teachers have been meaningfully consulted and understand how the PSP supports teachers and students.</p>	<p>Teacher voice is critical in shaping and implementing a new PSP for Nova Scotia.</p>	<p>Teachers who are interested in participating in a consultation session in their region are invited to submit their name through the following link: English Survey, French Survey (CSAP only)</p>

Complex Classrooms: Inspiring Schools, Additional Junior High Teacher Pilot Projects

Teachers remain very concerned about how to support the needs of all students within complex classrooms. The Council was required to wait to make policy-related recommendations in this area until after the Commission on Inclusive Education reports (before the end of March).

In the interim, Council committed to fund two pilot projects:

- \$2 million grant program shared among more than 40 Inspiring Schools
- 40 additional teachers to work with junior high math and literacy teachers with the most complex classrooms.

Council received feedback from school boards and participating schools, beginning with a presentation from Bryan Saulnier, Principal, l'École secondaire de Par-en-Bas. His school received Inspiring School funding, as well as support through the junior high and math project. His presentation spoke to significant benefits in terms of supporting teachers in their work, as well as improved student achievement in literacy and mathematics. Teachers and students were overwhelmingly positive.

Inspiring Schools

Council reviewed a summary of feedback from participating Inspiring Schools. Outcomes reported include:

- increased support for teachers with complex classrooms
- increased reading levels
- increased collaboration among teachers
- achievement of grade level outcomes for some IPP students
- improved behavior, fewer visits to the principal's office
- improved student and family engagement
- improved likelihood of graduation for students previously at risk of not graduating

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Council said participating schools highly valued the opportunity to be able to match the funding to the priorities within their school. As such, Council views this investment as being well-aligned with their commitment to respect the professional judgment of teachers and principals.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers continue to need support to deal with complex classrooms.		
Continue the Inspiring Schools pilot project for a second year, supported again by a \$2 million investment, cost-shared by Council and EECD. Establish a working group to review how the funding will be invested this year and evaluated next.	Most schools that received the funding last year would like to receive the funding again; other schools who did not receive funding would like to be considered.	A working group will be established immediately to confirm how schools will be selected; what amounts will be provided; and the criteria for proposals, emphasizing sustainability and measures that can be used for evaluation. The EECD funding does not extend beyond the 2018-19 school year.

40 Additional Teachers

Feedback on the 40 additional teachers was also generally positive; however, Council decided to await recommendations from the Commission on Inclusive Education before deciding whether to continue this pilot next year. The Commission report will be shared with Council on March 26.

Report Cards

Paperless Report Cards

Council continued its discussions on report cards, beginning with the option of paperless report cards.

Council reviewed a project initiated by two Grade 12 students in Halifax in 2016. The students believe that paper report cards at all grades, for all students, are a significant waste of time and money. They also surveyed teachers, parents and students (200 in each group).

- Teachers were asked: *Do you believe having report cards sent electronically to students and their families is a good idea?*
- Parents were asked: *Would you prefer to receive your child's report card electronically?*
- Students were asked: *Would you prefer to receive your report card electronically?*

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Summary of Survey Responses (%)			
	Teachers	Parents	Students
Yes, I prefer electronic.	71%	51%	39%
No, I prefer a paper copy.	2%	19%	21%
I would like the option of an electronic or paper copy.	26%	30%	40%
TOTAL who would prefer electronic or the option of either	97%	81%	79%

The students also estimated that, assuming each report card is 5 pages in length, that could be about 2 million pages for report cards provincially, a significant waste of paper and ink when the information can be more readily accessible to most parents and students electronically.

Council also discussed ways other provinces are working to improve communications to parents about student progress. For example, British Columbia parents could opt to see a portfolio of their child's work versus a report card. Most parents chose the portfolio. Now one university is accepting the student portfolio as part of the student's application for admission.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Paper report cards waste time and money, and are not environmentally-friendly.		
Create an implementation team, including representatives from Council, with the goal of having paperless report cards as an option in junior high/high school for the next school year.	Parents can continue to receive paper copies if they choose or need to do so. Time, paper, ink and effort will be saved. Increased use of PowerSchool can improve communications between families and teachers overall.	The implementation team will be formed before the end of March. The goal is to begin in junior high and high school because many parents already access information through PowerSchool.

Frequency of Reporting

Council values the importance of effective parent and teacher communication in supporting student achievement. With email and other opportunities to meet directly with parents, teachers are communicating more with parents than ever before.

Teachers and parents have also shared views on ensuring that the information that is shared, through report cards and other means, be meaningful. Lengthy comments filled with education jargon take a lot of time for teachers to write and often are unhelpful to parents.

Many teachers are also asking Council (and EECED through the most recent survey) to reduce the frequency of report cards. Council recognizes that parents would need to be consulted on reducing the frequency of report cards. At the same time, they believe the November report card at elementary could be streamlined and provide more meaningful information to parents on how their child is progressing.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Report cards are time-consuming for teachers to complete and are confusing for parents and students.		
Streamline the November elementary report card. Retain the learner profile, and report on progress (using the developmental code) in math and language arts. Retain one box for comments where teachers can include comments related to the learner profile or the student’s progress about outcomes.	One comment box allows teachers to continue to communicate to parents about what they need to know about their child’s learning (strengths, challenges, strategies for improvement), reducing confusing jargon for parents and reducing data entry for teachers.	Teachers remain responsible for notifying parents if their children are struggling.

Assessment Policy

Council continued discussion on the issue of social promotion and retention.

EECD presented assessment results that showed the same group of students over time (a cohort comparison). The data showed on most assessments, between 15 and 21 per cent of students who perform below expectations at one grade remain below expectations several grades later. For example, 19 percent of students who performed below expectations in Reading and Writing Grade 3, remained below expectation when they wrote Reading and Writing Grade 6.

This could mean that about 1 in 5 students do not get the support they need between grade levels to improve achievement. This contributes to the growing challenge for teachers to teach students who are socially promoted, without gaining the basic literacy and mathematics skills they need to succeed.

Council members discussed what existing supports are needed to help struggling students, and how those supports can be enhanced. They also discussed what additional supports or tools are needed, such as: more effective professional development for teachers, specialists and principals; more effective program planning; more specialized support; collaborative learning time; better data and reporting; parents as partners; appropriate technology supports, and a “tool shed” of strategies and resources, with trust in teachers to pick the right tools to meet the needs of their students.

Council expects that the Commission on Inclusive Education will make significant recommendations in these areas which will inform next steps in developing a new assessment policy. Along with the Commission recommendations, Council needs more information from EECD and clear timelines to ensure the work on the assessment policy is supported by research and evidence, and progresses on a schedule known to teachers.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers have waited a long time for a student assessment policy that will support greater student achievement, as well as improve classroom conditions.		
Present to Council a jurisdictional review, and draft consultation and work plan to support the development of a student assessment policy and implementation plan.	Teachers need reassurance that progress is happening on the assessment policy.	EECD should prepare this information for the April meeting. Enough lead time and support must be provided within the 2018-19 school year, to introduce the policy in September 2019.

Remaining 2017-18 Funding

Council has \$100,000 remaining in its 2017-18 budget.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers need additional resources and supports to help them help EAL/FAL students.		
Share Council's remaining \$100,000 for 2017-18 among all school boards, using \$5,000 as base funding for all boards, with a top up based on the percentage of EAL/FAL students per board compared to the total number of EAL/FAL students.	In 2016, \$100,000 was distributed using the same formula.	EECD will distribute the funding immediately.

Attendance

Evaluation of Policy and Attendance Support Worker Pilots

Council was asked for feedback on the evaluation of the attendance policy and attendance support worker pilot project. Specifically, Council was asked what has been surprising and unexpected in the early stages of implementation? And what impacts are they seeing on the ground?

- Missing 5 per cent of time may be too low a threshold to require teachers to call home. Calling home creates a lot of work for teachers, when they often know why the student is missing in the first place. One Council member highlighted a monthly spreadsheet that her principal is using, that lists all of the students who missed 5 per cent, saving teachers' time. Attendance notes can also indicate reasons for the absence, so a call does not need to be made. Council suggested that other tools through PowerSchool be explored.
- Council members noted less skipping in high school.
- The lack of a consequence at junior high could be contributing to less improvement in attendance than what is being experienced at high school. While an academic consequence may not be appropriate at this level, consequences related to participation in social or extracurricular activities could be considered. This would also be a transitional step to prepare students for the possibility of loss of credit at high school.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

- School secretaries may not have been given consistent direction or support on how to apply the policy. This could lead to inconsistencies in how attendance is being recorded.
- Teachers still feel pressured to provide makeup packages and to help students catch up after vacations or other extended absences.
- Where a pilot project is operating, some teachers are unclear about the role of the attendance support workers and how they access them for support.
- Council members are hearing that some principals are not allowing loss of credit, even after teachers have documented efforts to improve attendance and ultimately have to recommend credit loss. Teachers are getting frustrated if they do the work, then nothing is done.
- Increased communications between home and school is having a positive impact that extends beyond improvement in attendance.
- Even if attendance is not improving in the short-term, more interventions are having a positive impact on students.

Beyond surveys and data, Council suggested that:

- attendance support workers be asked to identify what strategies and tools worked best so these can be shared among all attendance support workers.
- when data suggests the greatest success, again focus on the tools and strategies that contributed to the success.
- it is important to track how the attendance programming and support funding is invested.
- data must be tracked on interventions and the outcome for the student.

Council would like to review recommendations for any policy changes in May, so communications on any changes for the fall can be communicated to schools in June.

Attendance Support Worker Pilot: Funding Criteria

Each Attendance Support Worker Pilot is supported by a \$1,000 per month (\$10,000 per school year) grant. Criteria have been established and are being shared with all attendance support workers and lead principals. As a guiding principle, funding should be used equitably, in ways that respect and support every student. The grant must be used to support a students' return to school or to promote overall student attendance.

Student Attendance Video Challenge

The working group planning the Student Attendance Video Challenge reported the following:

- The purpose of the video challenge is to increase student engagement and build awareness and support for the attendance policy.
- The video challenge will be open to students in grades 10 to 12. Group/class submissions or single student submissions are acceptable.
- Students are challenged to create a one-to-two-minute (maximum) video or iMovie describing why school attendance is important.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

- All videos will be previewed by the working group, with top selections judged by Council.
- Successful videos will meet the following criteria: clear/positive messaging, originality, creativity, how the idea is communicated, and overall impact.
- 3 prizes will be awarded for videos in French, and 3 for videos in English.
- The winning videos will be posted/shared with boards and schools through their websites and Twitter, as well as Instagram and Twitter.

Data Collection and Reporting

Streamlining Data Collection and Reporting

The Data Collection and Reporting Working Group provided an update on work to streamline current data collection and reporting work required of teachers. The working group is focusing work on four categories of data collection and reporting:

- grants requiring evaluation
- Justice and Community Services requests for data
- data requests for newcomers to Canada
- other requests above and beyond student services and assessment requests

At a previous meeting, Council decided to seek input from interested teachers on data collection based on the following questions:

- Is the purpose of the work clear?
- Is the work redundant or unnecessary?
- Can the work be streamlined?
- Could others in the school play a role in completing the work?

The working group decided to wait until the Commission Report on Inclusion is released to determine the best time to survey interested teachers. In the meantime, school board program directors are being asked for input on the categories and related questions.

Student Success Planning Common Survey

All school boards have used surveys to support student success planning. The surveys ask different questions and can be expensive to administer.

EECD is developing a uniform student experience survey to support student success planning. The draft Grades 4 – 6 survey was shared with the Data Collection and Reporting Working Group.

Data Collection and Grant Evaluations

The working group also discussed new approaches to support accountability and evaluation relating to grants. As one example, EECD has granted each school board with achievement gap funding to support

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Indigenous and African Nova Scotian learners, and learners living in poverty. Traditionally, educators would be asked to complete lengthy surveys or reports. This adds to teacher frustration when they are asked to fill out big reports simply to get the money to offer services their students need.

Reporting on the achievement gap grants involves provincial visitation to learn what is happening at the school, instead of lengthy surveys or reports. The working group would like EECD to consider ways this data collection practice could be used elsewhere.

Updates since February Meeting

Introduction of New Deputy, Council Co-Chair: Cathy Montreuil was appointed to the position of Deputy Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in March. Deputy Montreuil has taught in elementary and secondary schools, special education, care and treatment and custody programs, and has been a vice-principal, principal, superintendent, and Director of Education. She has served as a Superintendent of Education, and as the Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Student Achievement Officer in Ontario. The deputy has also worked with OECD, giving her opportunity to gain and share experience about education around the world.

Deputy Montreuil asked Council to present some of the highlights of their work over the past year. Council reviewed some of the work in attendance, assessment (including report cards), class caps, data entry, collection and reporting, student success planning, and the process to improve TIENET. The central message was, that while a lot has been accomplished to date, a lot more work remains. Council and Deputy Montreuil are eager to see the Report of the Commission on Inclusive Education, as this will lead to progress on the key concerns of teachers – classroom composition and student discipline.

The deputy congratulated Council on its work, saying it is groundbreaking in terms of collaborative professionalism. She said work that supports teachers and teacher professionalism in turn supports student achievement.

TIENET Changes: The final summary report of the “Ask the User” Research Project to streamline and simplify TIENET has now been shared with school boards and principals. It is posted at <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/classroomcouncil>.

The final report contains ten recommendations, some involving changes to the TIENET system, some for the department to consider, and others that were referred to the Commission on Inclusive Education. The initial TIENET changes (identified in consultation with teachers and other school staff to ensure minimal disruption mid-school year) are now live in the system, including:

- The existing two documents for Stage 2 and Stage 4 adaptations have been merged into one. Teachers who wish to record Stage 2 adaptations in TIENET can continue to do so; however, documentation, as well as calls home, are no longer required for Stage 2 adaptations.
- The referral for services process has been streamlined from a two-step to one-step process.
- The criteria section for current unfinalized IPPs has been removed.

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Further changes are planned for September 2018. Those changes are described in Appendix A of the final Ask the User report.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on April 9 – 11.