

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Meeting Discussion Summary and Recommendations October 10 & 11, 2017, Nova Scotia Teachers Union

Updates since September Meeting

Topic	Update
Council Membership	Denise McKean, grade 7 teacher, Bridgewater Junior High, joined Council, representing South Shore school board teachers, following Liz Brideau-Clark's departure to work with the school board.
Commission on Inclusive Education	Currently planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• meetings with teachers and others within school communities• four public meetings, including one streamed live• targeted stakeholder consultations• online survey Council members will dedicate future meeting time to discuss teachers' key concerns related to the Commission's mandate, and advise the Commission as they prepare their report, due in March 2018.
Principals' Forum	About 40 expressed interest so far, most at elementary. Department has gone back to principals in several school boards where interest was low. Forum should be up and running in November.
Ask the User, TIENet	Summary report drafted on what teachers and others said in spring, now being reviewed with the people interviewed to ensure accuracy. Two workshops scheduled in October to develop concrete recommendations for TIENet changes. Some recommendations may be implemented in the new year, others may be directed to the TIENet vendor or the Commission on Inclusive Education.
Moving Administrative/Marking Days from Year-End to before Report Card Due Dates	Reaction from teachers remains mixed. Some teachers believe some boards have more marking days than others (not the case). Some elementary teachers feel they are forced to have the same marking days as high school teachers (true in some but not all boards). Others feel some year-end activities could be at risk, while others are happy to have the day to prepare report cards. While changes are not possible for this school year, Council will continue to gather information from teachers about what they would like for future years.
Adaptation, IPP Development	Teachers appreciated the half-day they were provided to work on IPPs and adaptations. Council made this recommendation in its April report.
Substitutes for Teachers Supporting Junior High Math, Literacy Teachers	Council provided funding to school boards to hire 40 teachers to support junior high/middle school teachers with high numbers of students with IPPs or adaptations. Council directed the department to clarify with school boards that substitutes should be provided, when substitutes are available, when these teachers are sick.

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Student Attendance & Engagement Policy – Frequently Asked Questions

Council members shared questions they've been frequently asked by teachers, principals and parents.

Attendance Questions	Response
<p>If a student is suspended, how is the attendance recorded? Will the suspension days be counted toward the loss of credit?</p>	<p>Students will be marked absent. However, the <i>Education Act</i> requires the school or board to provide “academic support” or “alternative arrangements” for a student’s education when a student is suspended. Further, the attendance policy expects principals to use their professional judgment in deciding about loss of credit, considering “the overall welfare of the student.” The policy also requires documented interventions before a loss of credit can occur. If the student is making efforts to complete their school work and improve attendance because of the intervention, that will be considered by the principal.</p>
<p>While a principal’s decision on credit loss is final, the <i>Education Act</i> allows parents and students to have the board review a suspension decision. If the board overturns the suspension, could the days’ absent still count toward credit loss?</p>	<p>No. If the suspension is erased from the student’s record, the days cannot be counted toward the loss of credit.</p>
<p>If students have traditionally worked seasonally during the school year and were excused from school, can this continue?</p>	<p>The <i>Education Act</i> allows parents to apply to the school board for an employment-related school exemption certificate for students who are 15 years old or older. Council has directed the department to provide all boards with a common template to use for this purpose. Schools also have the option of accepting an educational plan (see next question).</p>
<p>What can parents use to complete the educational plan that exists as an option when there is a planned, extended absence from school?</p>	<p>The department is developing an educational plan template that schools can give to parents and students to complete. If schools have an educational plan they are already using, they can continue with what exists.</p>
<p>What efforts were made to share attendance information with principals, teachers and parents? Some didn’t feel they had the information they needed to understand the policy.</p>	<p>Information was provided to school boards to share with principals and schools. A letter for parents and Frequently Asked Questions were also provided. School boards are sharing this information in different ways and at different times. The attendance policy, operational guide and other supporting information can be found at www.ednet.ns.ca/student-attendance-and-engagement-policy.</p>

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If a student transfers , will absences from the previous school be counted toward loss of credit?	No.
What is the department doing to encourage more sports to be organized outside of the regular school day?	The department has been meeting with the Nova Scotia School Athletics Federation, and meetings are being scheduled with Hockey Nova Scotia and Basketball Nova Scotia. Council members also recommended that meetings take place with dance, volleyball and paddling organizations. How best to communicate with athletic directors in schools was also raised.
How many “lates” can be counted toward an absence?	School staff should work together to develop consistent practices for addressing late arrivals that meet their needs.
Can days missed before October 1 be counted towards loss of credit?	No. The policy took effect on October 1. Days missed before that cannot be counted.
Can the policy be clarified to allow principals to delegate some of the responsibilities?	Yes. The department will review the policy to see where that delegation may be possible.

The department is working on materials for schools to promote the value of regular attendance. The department will invest \$10,000 to create school tool kits, digital communications, posters and target social media to create awareness.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Schools do not want to have to prepare documents to respond to requests for pre-planned absences.		
Develop a common exemption certificate , consistent with what is described in the <i>Education Act</i> , that enables boards to consider excusing a student (at age 15 or older) from school for employment reasons .	The certificate provides an opportunity to describe what steps the student will take to keep up or catch up on school work.	The department must develop and share the exemption certificate by the end of October. If approved by the board, the days’ absent would not be counted toward loss of credit.
Develop a template that boards can use to provide to parents and students to complete the educational plan , described in the operational plan for the attendance policy.	Schools who are not using a form for educational plans will receive one.	The department must develop and share the educational plan and template as soon as possible.

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Student Attendance & Engagement Policy – Proposed Pilots

In response to Council’s September recommendation, the department brought forward a proposal for pilot projects that would involve hiring an attendance outreach worker to (a) work with students, families and schools to identify the reasons a student is missing a lot of time, and (b) connect the student and families with the right service or support – from inside or outside of the school – to help improve student attendance.

The department proposed linking the attendance outreach worker to the SchoolsPlus team. SchoolsPlus already has connections with community organizations, and provides programming that often promotes student engagement. SchoolsPlus teams also have regional advisory committees in place, involving the departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Justice, Community Services, and Health and Wellness. These existing partnerships could help bring community partners to the table to respond to reasons for high absenteeism that are outside the responsibility of the school.

Council members raised questions about positioning the attendance outreach worker with the SchoolsPlus team. Council members felt strongly that the attendance support worker must have a strong connection to the school principal, teachers and others in the school. Council was unclear how the existing SchoolsPlus teams “connect” with the school principal and other school staff.

The qualifications for the position were also discussed. Would a teacher (including social workers and other professionals who are teachers) be best qualified? Or would someone who has experience in community outreach and working with at-risk students and families be appropriate? Council also talked about not being overly prescriptive in terms of qualifications, as it could make it more difficult to hire someone, particularly in rural communities and for CSAP schools.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers need help in responding to attendance problems, especially when the reason for the absence is unrelated to school.		
Develop a job description that makes it clear what the attendance outreach worker would do, what would be the necessary qualifications, and what would be the relationship with the school principal, other school staff, and SchoolsPlus staff.	The work should be completed as a priority, with the goal of having attendance outreach workers in place for January.	The department and NSTU must work together on the job description before the next Council meeting.

Streamlining and Reducing School Board Assessments and Reporting Requirements

In November 2016, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development suspended all provincial and school board assessments until further notice. In the spring, Council recommended the department and school boards present rationale for any existing assessments they wanted to restart or streamline.

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The Minister accepted this recommendation and a recommendation for a five-year moratorium on any new assessments, unless proposals are submitted and accepted by Council. As a result, three provincial exams were eliminated, and two others were rescheduled to less busy times of year.

School boards requested time to present their proposal for streamlined board assessments this fall. Scott Milner, Superintendent, South Shore Regional, Dave Jones, Program and Services Director, Annapolis Valley Regional, and Alison King, Program and Student Services Director, Halifax Regional school boards, presented a proposal for school board assessments, on behalf of all school boards.

The presenters explained how teachers, schools and school boards use the assessment data:

- to make decisions on resource allocation generally
- to make decisions on what schools receive additional supports and resources (Reading Recovery teachers, math interventionists, etc.).
- to help inform work to close the achievement gap, and inform how boards and schools support students who are African Nova Scotian, Aboriginal and living in poverty.
- to inform professional development

They presented evidence of increased student achievement, based on how data and assessment results are analyzed and used:

- Halifax – By analyzing data collected by teachers for Student Success Planning math goals, the board identified that gaps in math understanding began to form as early as grade 2. Data pointed to a focus on Number Sense to improve overall student success. In response, the board identified an early intervention strategy and allocated funding to hire 3 elementary and one junior high math interventionists to support teachers by working with their most struggling math students. All students showed progress in the targeted math concepts with some students improving by a grade level or more.
- South Shore – The percentage of students who met expectations in the Grade 10 math exam grew by almost 15 per cent between 2014-15 and 2015-16
- Valley – The differential between students' average marks going into the math exam and the mark on the exam was 25 per cent in 2012. By 2016, that differential dropped to 3 per cent.

The presenters also shared positive feedback from teachers who value common assessments. They see them as valuable PD, valuable for students, and a contributor to improved student performance on provincial exams.

In developing their proposal, school boards identified key considerations:

- the need to reduce the number and frequency of assessments and reduce the burden on teachers
- the need to streamline data collection and reporting, and use what teachers are already doing
- greater consistency across boards
- teacher engagement in the assessment process

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- the purpose of board assessments as a formative process
- more focus / less work / better results
- high quality assessments with collaboratively examined results are a high yield practice

School Board Assessment Proposal

Board Proposal	Council Questions/Comments
Elementary	
<p>Eliminate all board Mathematics assessments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 boards had planned or were doing Math assessments. Included multiple grades, multiple collections. 	<p>What math assessments had individual boards been doing or were planned, before assessments were suspended?</p>
<p>Enable boards to access data teachers already collect – specifically, the reading/running record and a writing sample scored with a rubric.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boards propose accessing this data twice yearly maximum in alignment with teacher practice. Some boards had been requiring data rollup, in a prescribed form, three times a year. • Boards have literacy interventionists and other staff that can work with teachers who need support in assessing their students’ reading and writing. • Reading and writing are an expected professional practice. 	<p>Council members agree with the value of a running record and how that informs teachers. They are concerned about what teachers could be asked to do in terms of data entry or “roll up”. They appreciated the presenters saying it should not add an unreasonable amount of work for the teacher and data input would not be duplicated (it could be as simple as taking a picture of whatever the teacher has already recorded or copying a paper record). However, Council wants more information on what this looks like. This should include a discussion around time or times of year.</p> <p>Council also questioned why this data was needed twice a year, and how boards are using it.</p> <p>Some council members said, with complex classrooms, teachers find it harder to find time to provide extended one-on-one assessments. They wondered if they could get substitute release time for running records. This is currently the subject of a grievance filed by the NSTU.</p>
<p>Restart the Oral Language Assessment (P to 2, CSAP only).</p>	<p>Council would like more information on this assessment. Has it been used before? How does it affect teacher workload? How would results be used?</p>

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Junior High/Middle	
Eliminate all board Literacy assessments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 boards had planned or were doing Literacy assessments. Included multiple grades, multiple collections. 	What literacy assessments had individual boards been doing or were planned, before assessments were suspended?
Allow a maximum of one common math assessment in either 7, 8 or 9. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of the process of the creation, analysis and response to the common assessment is as important as the data created. 	Some council members spoke to the value of common assessments – with teachers working together on developing them and analyzing results. Using a common assessment saves teachers time as it can replace one they would otherwise have to prepare on their own. Others asked about what information is provided on a board exam that cannot be gathered in the provincial exam, or vice-versa. Some also have not had the same opportunities to work with teachers in analyzing results of common assessments.
High	
Require all boards to eliminate all but one assessment.	What assessments, by board, existed before assessments were suspended? What ones were planned?
Allow a maximum of one common assessment (with the subject determined by the board) in either 10, 11 or 12.	Generally, council asked the same questions and comments on the high school common assessment as they did about the common junior high assessment.

Council made no recommendations on specific board assessments at this meeting; their recommendation at this stage is to provide more information. Until recommendations on specific assessments are made, board-mandated assessments and reporting requirements remain suspended. Further, boards are not permitted to create new assessments, unless Council accepts a board proposal. Finally, Council can recommend accepting some, none or all of the board proposals, or recommend accepting them with revisions.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Too much duplication and data entry is involved in assessments, taking time away from teaching.		
Ask boards for more information on: how they would access and use data elementary teachers collect already in a way that doesn't increase teacher workload; what individual boards were doing or planning to do before assessments were suspended; and what differences exist between board and provincial assessments.	Council needs more information.	School boards will provide additional information at the November council meeting.

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Report Cards

Council members say teachers remain frustrated with report cards and are eager to see changes. The greatest frustration seems to be about writing comments.

Council also continues to hear from teachers, who are interested in an integrated report card (reporting on math and literacy), and some who want to continue to report on other subjects.

Council members focused on finalizing a survey for Grades 4 – 6 teachers, to be part of a broader survey on Grades 4 – 6 curriculum changes. Council members provided feedback on all questions, as originally drafted by the department. They want:

- teachers to have a range of report card options to consider (integrated, status quo, or a middle option that allows teachers to continue to give a mark on multiple subjects but can give fewer comments, perhaps in fewer areas)
- a more manageable way for specialist teachers (e.g., phys. Ed., music, art) who have multiple classes, so they are not expected to comment on every student during every reporting period
- teachers to have clear direction on a simpler way to complete comments
- teachers to be able to comment on behaviors from the learning profile in the subject-area comment blocks (e.g., Kim needs to continue to focus on following directions and fully completing tasks with independence.)
- all Grades 4 – 6 teachers, including those in CSAP, to be able to participate in the survey

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Report card comments need to be easier for teachers to complete and easier for parents and students to understand.		
Distribute the report card survey to Grades 4 – 6 teachers by the end of October. Bring results back to Council in November or December. Communicate decision on changes by early spring.	Teachers want to know what changes are likely to happen as soon as possible.	The department is revising the survey now, and will distribute ASAP.
Develop a clear, one-page information sheet on comment writing, including tips, examples, and corrections of misinformation on what teachers believe they can and cannot write.	Teachers have been told different things about what they can and cannot write in report card comments.	The department needs to share the information sheet before the November reporting period (by the end of October).

Education Administration and Governance Review

Government has hired Avis Glaze, an internationally recognized expert, to review its education administrative model. Dr. Glaze came to meet Council the day she was appointed, and praised Council for being a leader in Canada in giving teachers a voice in education decision-making.

Dr. Glaze served as Ontario's education commissioner and senior adviser to the Minister of Education.

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She was the province’s first chief student achievement officer and founding CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. She was awarded the Order of Ontario, as well as many international awards, for her contributions to education.

She has extensive experience in system and school improvement having worked with educators in almost 50 countries. She was sent to South Africa by the Canadian government to assist with education reform and national reconstruction and has assisted with education reform in New Zealand. Most recently, she was invited to assist Scotland with its system and school improvement. She has also been a classroom teacher, special education teacher, guidance counsellor, administrator and a faculty of education professor.

The review will look at how public schools are administered, including elected school boards and their central office administration, along with administration at the department.

She expects to complete her work by the end of December. While the time frame is tight, decisions are needed early in the new year, if changes are to be implemented for the 2018–19 school year. While she believes she can get the work done, Dr. Glaze said she will ask for more time if she needs it.

Dr. Glaze says she has no preconceived notion about results; she wants to listen first and rely on research and consultation. She will begin meetings immediately across the province, focusing on key questions around what works well and what needs improvement, related to system administration and governance.

Dr. Glaze plans to come back to Council’s November meeting.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Timelines for the review are tight, and will require clear information and focused effort		
Define governance simply and clearly, so teachers have an appropriate context within which to frame their lived experiences and responses.	This will help people understand how governance and administration relate to their work and experiences.	The department, in consultation with Dr. Glaze, will develop and share this immediately.
Develop a Council working group to advise Dr. Glaze on ways to gather teachers’ views, and to plan the November meeting of full Council with Dr. Glaze on the governance and administrative review.	The timeline requires focused attention. Council also wants the review to consider the importance of inter-agency collaboration.	The department and NSTU will co-chair the group. Council members have already volunteered.

Data Collection and Reporting

Teachers are concerned about the amount of time required to collect and report data to school boards and the department. The department and school boards may also survey teachers at different times of the year, and the reasons behind data collection aren’t always clearly communicated.

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As a result, Data Collection and Reporting was one of the 10 priorities that the Council was legislated to address. Council has already made progress in reducing data collection and reporting:

- Eliminating several provincial assessments and putting a five-year moratorium in place on new provincial and board assessments, unless proposed assessments are reviewed and approved by Council
- Streamlining the Student Success Planning process and documentation
- Identifying preliminary changes to TIENET and PowerSchool, and initiating the Ask the User process to lead to more significant system changes

Next Steps, Key Questions

Council has created a working group to advance work that got under way in the spring. Specifically, the department and boards prepared a preliminary summary of required data collection, as requested by Council. The working group will consider questions including:

- What data are teachers required to collect and report on now? Is the preliminary summary complete? Accurate?
- Is there data collection and reporting that you think is unnecessary? Or data collection for which the purpose is unclear?
- Are there ways that the work related to data collection and reporting could be streamlined? For example, could the data be collected less frequently or at less busy times of the year?
- Could others in the school play a role in the collecting or reporting of data?

B.Ed. Steering Committee

Representatives from the Bachelor of Education Steering Committee were lunch-time speakers at Council. The B.Ed. Steering Committee is co-chaired by the department and a university president, with representatives from government, the NSTU, deans of universities offering B.Ed. programs, and school board superintendents.

The steering committee was created two years' ago. Its purpose is "to recommend and implement revised teacher pre-service and in-service education programs that meet the new Teaching Standards and support excellence in teaching, learning, and student success." It has also defined its expected outcomes:

- Increased student achievement supported by consistent high-quality teaching
- Teacher pre-service and in-service education that builds capacity for excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and student success;
- Increased accessibility to continuing education options for teachers, regardless of where they live; and
- On-going identification and adaptation of teacher education as specific teacher professional learning needs arise.

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The steering committee's work involves research, consultation and collaboration. The research phase involved surveying more than 200 recent B.Ed. graduates, asking them:

- Do new teachers feel prepared?
- How do new teachers evaluate their Bachelor of Education programs of study?
- Do new teachers feel confident in their teaching?
- How do new teachers rate their student teaching experiences?

Survey results include:

- 57% rated their B.Ed. program as positive (16% excellent, 41% as good), 37% as fair, and 6% as poor.
- Three key topics (behaviour management, adapting to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs, and classroom management) need more priority in the curriculum.
 - 89% wished they had learned more in behavior management
 - 89% recommended more priority on adaptations to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs
 - 84% wished they learned more to identify and address special learning needs, and 81% wished they learned more about adapting curriculum to meet students' needs
 - 85% of respondents wished they learned more about classroom management

Council echoed what was found in the research – teachers want more practical education and experience in the B.Ed. program, with a more robust and realistic practicum that prepares teachers for when they are in the classroom on their own. The value of mentoring for new teachers was referenced, as well as the role teachers could play in B.Ed. workshops and other ways, particularly in classroom management.

Consultation involved focus groups with 30 teachers who supervised student teachers at least once in the last five years; a world café with department staff from all branches; and teaching staff from each university that offers a B.Ed. program.

At this stage, the committee has developed an umbrella curriculum, common across universities. The umbrella curriculum grounded in the research, teaching standards, and global principles of “good teaching” so all universities have common program outcomes.

Other work includes developing a Teacher Education Program Accreditation model, being developed in partnership with Nova Scotia universities and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. The practicum is also being examined, including the role of the supervising teachers.

Work should be complete by Spring 2019.

Next Meeting

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The next meetings are November 6, 7 and 8.