
I Subject Opportunity to Learn - Quantity of Instructional Time

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Approved By: Dennis Cochrane, Deputy Minister
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Review: Every three years

II Provincial Policy Statement

Instructional time is intended to be used to address the outcomes of the *Public School Program (PSP)*. This framework specifically addresses use of instructional time for non-classroom activities, and non-instructional activity in classrooms.

A major factor influencing student success is opportunity to learn, the two major elements of which are *quality*, and *quantity* of time. Time is a precious resource in public schools, and must be protected because it is so important for student learning. This framework addresses the quantity of time aspect, in support of requirements for instructional time for specific programs as described in the Provincial *Time to Learn Strategy*, and guidelines.

III Principles

Decisions on reasonable use of instructional time should be based on these guidelines:

- Use the specific learning outcomes of the *Public School Program (PSP)* to determine and justify educational value to students of the proposed use of time.
- Strike a balance among all out-of-class activities to ensure students have opportunities to meet outcomes in all areas. Activities have varying degrees of value relative to this standard. Those of less value should be limited in favour of meeting learning outcomes.
- Recognize that education, e.g. delivery of the PSP, is each school's first priority.
- Recognize that schools are responsible to protect instructional time as a resource.
- Ensure that the impact of learning lost as a result of missed time is assessed.

IV Definitions

- Classroom - This is a space in which teachers address the outcomes of the *Public School Program*, and students participate actively in the learning process during instructional time. This may include space within school, or in another facility if it is regularly used by a school to address outcomes of the *Public School Program*.
- Discretionary absence - This is when parents request that students be excused from regular instruction for non-school-related reasons (e.g. vacations, sport, music, theatre or other activity unrelated to the program offered by the school).

- Instructional time - The time scheduled in the 195-day school calendar that is intended specifically for instruction, and in accordance with the *Ministerial Education Act Regulations* 2 (1) to (6) and 3 (1) to (11) inclusive, is not less than a certain number of hours of teaching in each classroom on each school day.
- Non-classroom activities - This term refers to activities, during scheduled instructional time, which takes place outside of classrooms (see ‘classroom’).
- Non-instructional activities - These are activities other than those intended to address outcomes of the PSP.
- Partners - Education partners specified in the *Education Act* (students, parents/guardians, teachers, support staff, principals, superintendents and school boards, Minister) who may make, or assist in making, decisions about use of instructional time. Other partners which may support such decisions include but are not limited to School Advisory Councils, and community members involved in educational activity or supporting learning activities.
- Reasonable - Use of instructional time is related to specific learning outcomes of the PSP, students have opportunities to meet outcomes in all areas, and actions to offset missed instructional time are rigorous enough to mitigate missed time without being unnecessarily onerous for students in the judgement of responsible decision-makers at each level (teachers through to superintendent or designate).
- Voluntary absence - This term refers to student absence from scheduled instructional time for reasons other than those excused by the school, e.g. illness or quarantine, or those defined as ‘discretionary absence’.
- Whole class activities - Activities undertaken by an entire class of students, usually as part of a learning activity; distinct from activities undertaken by some students in a class (e.g. sports, band) which may not lead to achievement of specific learning outcomes.
- Whole school activities - This term refers to activities, during scheduled instructional time, which usually involves all classes in a school e.g. assemblies, drills, or school wide special events e.g. Education Week activities.

V Framework Objectives

This framework’s objectives are to

1. Help ensure students have the time they need to learn and teachers have time to teach, by reducing time lost due to interruptions, by means of school board guidelines within which partners may make decisions about how instructional time is used for non-classroom activities.

2. Clarify the central concern is how instructional time is used, all partners share responsibility for effective use of instructional time, and students are expected to attend school and participate actively in the learning process at all possible times.
3. Convey the expectation that schools and teachers be accountable to
 - Plan for achievement of learning outcomes during non-classroom activity.
 - Plan/carry out classroom follow-up activity linked to learning outcomes.
 - Demonstrate the achievement of those outcomes upon request.
 - Plan/carry out ways to minimize the impact of missed instructional time related to the *Time to Learn Strategy*, and all subject areas.
4. Provide guidelines for schools when they must address requests that individual students miss instructional time, that are not within the board or school's control.

VI Application

Within this framework, school boards will develop guidelines for schools regarding their choices and decisions about use of instructional time, and for partners regarding requests that individual students miss instructional time outside of school control.

The province's existing initiatives regarding quantity of instructional time continue to apply (e.g. common calendar, *Time to Learn* strategy, and guidelines for specific courses). These all state expectations about best use of instructional time, and by incorporation within this provincial framework, should be considered as equivalent to provincial policy.

VII Provincial Expectations - School Board Guidelines

1. All school boards will develop guidelines consistent with this framework and having regard to the *Time to Learn Strategy*. Guidelines will include Section III: Principles as criteria to assess the value of non-classroom activities.
2. Media shown to students must normally be on the Authorized Learning Resources (ALR) List or available through the Education Media Library. Other media have not undergone bias evaluation to ensure they are appropriate for school use and are not copyright-cleared. School licences with companies like Audio-cine Films and Visual Education Centre constitute proper copyright clearance for *some* films and are not blanket clearance. Copyright issues require continued monitoring.
3. Guidelines which apply to whole-class or school activities that are scheduled to occur in instructional time should include these provisions:
 - Non-classroom activity, required as a part of the curriculum, are permitted with the principal's approval.
 - Non-classroom activity, clearly linked to achievement of one or more specific outcomes *may* be approved in accordance with board guidelines.
 - Non-classroom activity, not clearly linked to outcomes should be strictly limited, and may be prohibited by school board guidelines. The impact of

- removing students from scheduled instruction should be considered.
 - Missed instructional time for non-class activity may not exceed three consecutive school days unless approved by the superintendent or designate, who will consider the circumstances and rationale, whether due diligence has been exercised, and the requester's commitment to assess outcomes for students of the time missed.
- 4. Where activities mean students miss scheduled classroom instruction, guidelines should ensure that schools consider such requests based on value of the activity to students' achievement of learning outcomes of the PSP. School boards should adapt existing forms to cover out of school activity of any length, for any day, except if required pursuant to the PSP and approved by the principal, or if school facilities are unavailable, and to capture additional information, including the
 - Educational purpose of the activity.
 - Educational activities planned during the activity, outcomes to be achieved, and classroom follow up to link the activity to instruction.
 - Amount of student instructional time missed to participate in the activity.
 - Plan to minimize the impact of missed time to fulfill requirements of the *Time to Learn Strategy*, to the extent possible and reasonable, and how students will be involved in activities to offset the impact of missed time.
 - Plan to offset the impact of specific instruction missed to the extent possible and reasonable, and what students will do to offset missed time.
- 5. Schools will adhere to Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation guidelines for NSSAF events, and school boards will monitor this adherence. These guidelines are consistent with principles in this framework, particularly
 - Regulation IV Student Eligibility, especially 12 re: academic performance.
 - Regulation V Classification of Schools, especially 4 re: teams per school.
 - Regulation VII Athletic Contests, especially 12 re: start-up dates and restrictions, and 24 re: the expectation that school sport competitions occur outside of regular class hours during the week including Friday afternoon.
 - Regulation IX Non-Federation Competition, re: advance NSSAF sanction.
 - Statement of Beliefs, especially 6, 7, 9, and 10.
- 6. Non-classroom activity in December and May-June will have educational value, including post-activity follow up to link to classroom instruction, recognizing that some activities provide opportunities not otherwise available to some students.
- 7. So trips do not interfere with school operation for remaining students, board guidelines should include a reasonable chaperone ratio of parents and teachers.

VIII Additional Optional Guidelines

Boards may consider whether to include the following elements in their guidelines:

1. As much as possible, non-instructional activities occur outside of scheduled instructional time
 - Examples normally in school control are Public Address announcements, money collection, or outer wear dressing in younger grades. Options include walkie-talkies vs. PA announcements to find people, e-mailing or posting information in lieu of announcements, scheduling dressing and other non-instructional time into the day, outside of the instructional schedule (and, in so doing, ensuring adequate time for recess and lunch).
2. Assistance for schools screening requests for presentations to students in instructional time (other than by invitation of the school or teacher), and criteria to screen research, charity, etc. requests requiring students' time during school hours
 - One option is to put information in school newsletters or the school's web site, to meet the group's objective without interrupting instructional time, another is to seek School Advisory Council advice, or have the requesting group consider the educational value of its request. It may be possible to encourage students to take part in community charity activity occurring outside school time, rather than in a similar activity at school.
3. Community partners' awareness that NSSAF handbook standards apply to the organization of invitational tournaments, and that the amount of missed time for such tournaments should be assessed in accordance with Section III: Principles.
4. How SACs might advocate for their school's instructional time, such as by advising on how to:
 - Assist the school to examine use of time and address parent concerns.
 - Consider the number and type of charitable activities, and parents' capacity to support them, possibly based on the school's goals and values.
 - Prioritize and respond to requests that interrupt instruction (e.g., external presentations), and help articulate educational links to parents.
 - Help parents understand how activities planned for days when schools are closed to students add value for students (one school reduced complaints significantly by posting information on what teachers do on such days).
 - Help to identify where parents could benefit from additional information.
5. Information that could be helpful for parents, including:
 - a. How parents can support teachers to enhance children's learning success.
 - b. Parent and student responsibility in the Act to ensure attendance at school.
 - c. The value of instructional time, importance of being in class, the educational value of activities, and the impact of missed instructional time.
 - d. That homework packages do not offset missed instructional time.
 - e. The importance of ensuring students regularly attend school throughout

- the school year, including days prior to examinations.
- f. The educational pressure on students arising from participation in local sport or performance activities, when combined with other missed time.
 - g. The extent to which it is realistic to expect teachers to re-teach material missed due to voluntary or discretionary absences.
 - h. That when removing students from instruction, the main consideration is the impact on achieving learning outcomes, and not length of absence.

IX Accountability

All partners' accountabilities as noted below are aimed at ensuring instructional time is used in the best interests of all students' learning and achievement.

- Schools are accountable to their school boards for adhering to board guidelines, for involving SACs and parents in decisions to ensure best use of instructional time, and for demonstrating results to their school boards upon request.
- School boards are accountable to the Minister for the control and management of schools, and compliance with Ministerial policies and directives including this framework. They develop, implement, and monitor guidelines; direct schools to maintain records as the board determines; and demonstrate results upon request.
- The Department of Education is accountable under Section 145 (1) of the *Education Act*, and Regulations 2 and 3 of the *Ministerial Education Act Regulations* to prescribe time and instruction for school boards. It will maintain and promote this framework, and associated directives referenced here, and monitor as described in Section X: Monitoring.

X Monitoring

The department will monitor with a focus on ensuring available instructional time is used in the best interests of students' learning and achievement. Monitoring will be for the dual purpose of ensuring the system is accountable for use of time, and identifying current practices. Best practices can be shared, and areas of concern identified so that they may be constructively addressed, in the best interests of students' learning and achievement.

XI References (Appendices)

The first three appendices are existing provincial directives about instructional time, which are part of this framework. The final three are additional relevant references.

A – Instructional Time and Semestering–February 2002, and all Guidelines

B – *Public School Program* (extracted references)

C– Current Policy and Information Release re: School Calendar

D–*Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together* (extracted references)

E – *Education Act, Ministerial Education Act Regulations* and the *Public School Program* (provisions related to use of instructional time)

F – Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation Handbook (re: use of instructional time)

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