Report of the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

April 28, 2017

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia
Teachers Union

Contents

Introduction

The Council to Improve Classroom Conditions is expected to identify and study teachers' concerns and make recommendations to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and school boards on ways to improve classroom conditions and help teachers support student learning and success.

While not limiting the council's mandate, the following priorities were identified through the collective bargaining process and are now reflected in legislation:

- data collection and reporting
- assessment and evaluation
- feasibility of moving pupil evaluation, classification, and administrative days immediately prior to report card days
- student attendance policy
- technology and work processes, including PowerSchool and TIENET
- teachers' scope of practice
- planning for student success
- complex classrooms
- class sizes at all levels
- student discipline policies

The council was tasked with submitting recommendations on the first five priorities by April 28, 2017. In March and April the council met for seven days, and for more than 55 hours. The council has met its commitment to identify initial recommendations for the first five priorities, as well as for the class sizes and complex classrooms priorities.

The council has also identified additional issues which teachers wish to consider, provided they are systemic in nature (see Appendix C: Additional Priorities for Consideration by the Council).

At its first meeting on March 18, council members shared the following expectations:

- All voices will be heard and valued.

- The council will seek out voices beyond those at the table.

- Teachers' autonomy and professional judgment should be respected.

- Changes proposed by the council will enable teachers to spend more time teaching—not wasted on tasks that don't support students or go beyond their scope of practice. Other professionals in the areas of health, social services, and justice must also do their part to support students.

- Changes proposed by the council must be tangible and practical—they should be seen and felt in the classroom by students and teachers.

- Changes proposed by the council will be implemented equitably.

- Change must be sustainable, and not all change costs money: creativity and shifts in attitudes and approaches can be just as important.

Some changes can happen right away. Others will take more time, research, evidence, and listening.

As the meetings progressed, members were struck by the diversity of practices between the boards. This diversity makes it challenging to implement change in a consistent way.

The council has the ability to direct the allocation of a $20 million budget over two years. Government has said that if the council identifies priority issues that require additional funding, this funding will be considered from within the EECD budget or as part of the regular budgeting process.

Executive Summary

The Council to Improve Classroom Conditions was established on March 7, 2017. The council is expected to recommend ways to improve classroom conditions and to help teachers support student learning and success.

In March and April the council met for seven days, and for more than 55 hours. As a result of these meetings, the council has identified 40 initial recommendations in the areas of broader engagement; assessment and evaluation; attendance; class sizes; complex classrooms; data collection and reporting; pupil evaluation, classification, and administrative days; and technology and work processes (including PowerSchool and TIENET).

Note: Recommendations already made public and accepted by EECD and the NSTU are shaded in grey.

Recommendations	Timeline
Broader Engagement	
Problem: No clear process has been established for teachers and others to share views with and receive information from council members.	
Establish a province-wide Google group for teacher representatives to seek input and share information.	May
Share council agenda with all teachers and administrators at least one week in advance of council meetings.	May and ongoing
Ask all who work in schools to put their names forward to be part of issue-specific working groups.	May
Ask interested schools to identify their top five concerns.	May
Invite teachers and other experts and stakeholders to present to council on key issues.	Beginning for the May meeting
Prepare and share a summary of discussions and record of actions following each council meeting.	Posted monthly
Share information with principals and seek their direct input on key issues.	Immediate and ongoing
Engage parents, students, school boards, and advocacy groups on issues directly affecting them through school advisory councils, home and school associations, and student councils, and	Immediate and ongoing

communicate directly with organizations and associations.	
Assessment and Evaluation	
Problem: Data is collected but is not broadly shared and not used in ways to help children identified as needing help.	
Require EECD and school boards to share EDI data with all early elementary teachers, and provide supports for schools which have a high concentration of children with vulnerabilities.	EECD (Early Years) has begun discussions with school boards and will report back to council at a future meeting.
Problem: Teachers are in the best position to assess their students' progress, and additional provincial or board assessments take time away from teaching and learning.	
End three provincially-mandated assessments and exams: Grade 1 Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement; Grade 2 Common Math Assessment; and Math at Work 10 provincial exam.	Effective immediately. Teachers can continue to access parts of the Observation Survey and questions from the Grade 2 math assessment, based on their professional judgment.
Continue the suspension for this year (2016–17) of: the Grade 8 Reading, Writing and Mathematics assessment and Grade 10 exams.	Effective immediately. Teachers can ask their board math contact for Grade 10 exams if they want to use them.
Direct EECD and school boards to present rationale for any assessments they wish to continue, eliminate, or streamline so council can make recommendations before any assessments are re-initiated next year.	May and June council meetings
Institute a five-year moratorium on any new board- or EECD-initiated assessments, unless proposals are submitted and approved by the council.	Effective immediately
Problem: The education system has lowered expectations for students, limiting teachers' ability to prepare them for post-secondary education and employment.	
Ask EECD to develop draft policies that support ▪ assessment and evaluation ▪ promotion, retention, and acceleration The draft policies must support students' best interests, respect teachers' professional judgment, and address concerns around deadlines, use of zeros, and "no fail" practices.	May and June council meetings

Problem: Report cards are time-consuming for teachers to complete and are confusing for parents and students.	
Ask EECD to explain the rationale for report card changes made over the past several years and present options to simplify report cards, including the option of paperless report cards.	May or June council meetings

Attendance

Problem: Teachers and principals have waited a long time for an attendance policy.	
Request that EECD release the draft policy immediately to gather and return feedback to the council before the May 17 meetings, to communicate the policy to schools in June, and to take effect in September.	Feedback to be complete and returned to the council by May 9
Problem: Principals have not seen the draft policy.	
Ask principals to share the policy with staff and school advisory councils and encourage feedback to council members or through the department's website.	Feedback to be complete and returned to the council by May 9
Problem: Some children are absent for reasons beyond their control.	
Request that EECD and school boards bring forward research and best practices on outreach to families or other supports and accountability measures to increase attendance.	May meeting

Class Sizes

Problem: Some junior high/middle school and high school classes are too big.	
Set a class cap of 28 (+2) for junior high/middle school and 30 (+2) for high school.	School boards are currently developing staffing plans and require direction on staffing recommendations now.
Problem: Teachers in priority schools need more support to deal with complex classrooms.	
Provide funding to hire 40 teachers (to work in class or through pullout) for a junior high/middle school pilot project to support math and literacy in classrooms that have high numbers of students with special needs. Distribute funds so all boards receive some teachers.	School boards are currently developing staffing plans and require direction on staffing recommendations now.

Create a $2M fund to enable up to 40 priority schools with the most complex classrooms to submit proposals to a council working group to receive $50,000. Ask EECD to contribute $1M of the $2M. Some school boards already target funding to priority schools, and are expected to work collaboratively with principals on ways to maximize all investments and the benefits the investments bring to students.	School boards are currently developing staffing plans and require direction on staffing recommendations now. The council working group should form immediately.
Problem: The number of students on Individual Program Plans (IPPs) is unevenly distributed among classrooms. This adds to the complexity of the classroom, and is not in the best interests of the student or teacher.	
Direct registrars or others responsible for scheduling classes to avoid scheduling a large number of students on IPPs within one class.	Begin discussions with principals immediately. Refer also to the Commission on Inclusive Education.
Problem: A limited number of online courses are available to CSAP and French Immersion students.	
Open courses offered by Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS) in French to both CSAP and French immersion students.	EECD should begin discussions with CSAP on how to resolve potential issues immediately.

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Complex Classrooms

Note: These are initial recommendations until the Commission on Inclusive Education reports, with recommendations on complex classrooms expected.

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Problem: Classroom teachers have little or no time to plan for and prepare IPPs.	
Request that school boards re-examine how they allocate their share of the $750,000 currently provided, and manage these funds to ensure that teachers with more than one IPP are granted more release time.	Boards should review how they allocate funds before the end of this school year and put changes in place by fall 2017.
Direct boards to allocate half of the fall (September, October) PD day for teacher self-directed IPP and adaptation development. Give teachers the option to request more time if they have multiple or complex IPPs.	Fall 2017

Data Collection and Reporting	
Problem: Data entry is taking more and more time away from teaching, and the purpose is not always clear.	
Form a working group to recommend ways to streamline data collection and reporting. Identify recommendations related to Student Success Planning as a first priority.	May, June

Pupil Evaluation, Classification, and Administrative Days	
Problem: Up to three days were negotiated into the collective agreement to give teachers time to prepare for report cards, but they are not consistently scheduled or used for this purpose.	
Require school boards to consult principals and schedule the days as follows: ▪ For elementary and junior high, two out of three evaluation days prior to report card due dates, and the third at the end of the year for year-end duties. ▪ For high school, one administration day after January semester exams but before the report card due date, and two following the June semester exams.	Consult principals immediately so changes can be made to school calendars for 2017–18

Technology and Work Processes	
Problem: PowerSchool and TIENET were imposed expecting teachers to meet the systems' needs, instead of designing systems that meet the needs of teachers.	
Engage Service Nova Scotia to work with teachers and other TIENET/PowerSchool users to recommend changes, beginning with TIENET. Recommendations should address all aspects of the systems, including policies and processes, roles and responsibilities for related tasks, training, communication, implementation supports, and system changes.	Work under way

Problem: Publishing instant "in-progress" marks (or a rolling average) is causing confusion and anxiety for parents and students, and more and more questions for teachers.	
Issue a provincial directive permitting teachers to publish marks less frequently on PowerSchool at their discretion. Allow the school to determine when the in-progress mark is displayed, at least once a month. Develop user guides on in-progress marks and publishing grades to support board project managers, school administrators (and registrars where available), and teachers.	Effective April 3
Problem: Some boards require teachers to assign marks for every outcome. This is extremely time-consuming, with some teachers required to enter as many as 500 marks.	
Issue a provincial directive to end any practice that requires teachers at any grade to assign a mark to every individual outcome in PowerSchool.	Effective April 3
Problem: Technology enables parents to communicate with teachers at any time of day, and parents often expect immediate responses that disrupt classrooms.	
Confirm with boards and principals that teachers can have up to two business days to respond to emails. Help teachers communicate this expectation to parents (e.g., on board, school, and teacher websites, in the September communications to families, in PowerSchool and iNSchool, and in newsletters).	May
Problem: When teachers record attendance at the start of a class, some are frustrated by having to reopen PowerSchool—sometimes multiple times— to enter attendance data for students arriving late.	
Issue a provincial directive so high school teachers may wait to enter attendance into PowerSchool until the end of the school day.	Effective April 3, 2017
Problem: A wealth of resources exists to support teachers in using PowerSchool and TIENET; however, these resources are so extensive that teachers find it hard to locate what they need.	
Create and promote short videos and user guides on key PowerSchool activities. Make them available on well-known, accessible sites.	May

Problem: Elementary teachers are unclear about whether they are expected to use GradeBook for more than report cards.	
Advise elementary teachers that they are only required to use GradeBook for report cards. Additional use of GradeBook is at their discretion.	May
Problem: Resource teachers are spending too much time scanning and uploading TIENET documents.	
Give administrative assistants access to TIENET to facilitate uploading of documents and reduce administrative tasks of teachers in a shared, collaborative way at the school level.	May
Problem: Teachers are losing teaching time to data entry with limited value or an unclear purpose.	
Explore options for replacing the Stage 2 adaptations form in TIENET with a more streamlined form or checklist, either in TIENET or in another form that is practical for teachers.	Refer this to the Ask the User research team
Share a user guide and short video with teachers and administrators on how to copy adaptations, IPPs, and other documents year-to-year in TIENET.	May
Problem: The IPP process and associated paperwork is more complicated than necessary.	
End the requirement to record assessments in two places: in the annual student program log as well as at the top of the IPP.	May
Problem: Some students are kept on IPPs longer than necessary.	
Support teachers, other school professionals, and parents with the process of transitioning students from IPPs to public school program outcomes through the program planning process.	Refer to the Commission on Inclusive Education
Problem: Some children are entering grade primary before they are developmentally ready to learn and succeed.	
Request that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development explore ways to increase the readiness of children to learn and succeed when they enter grade primary. Consider: ▪ reinstating September 30 as the cut-off date to reach age 5 to start school	September 2018

▪ creating a universal pre-primary program (play-based), including Africentric, Mi'kmaq, and other culturally responsive programs.	

Budget Summary

Directing new resources to the classroom

The council has allocated $9.3 million of its year one funding of $10 million to address recommendations listed in the following table. The council expects to make recommendations on its additional $700,000 before the end of the current school year. An additional $10M will be available in 2018–19, for a total of $20M.

One recommendation calls for EECD to contribute a matching $1 million to assist teachers in priority schools. With this included, a total of $11 million will be available to improve classroom conditions in the 2017–18 school year. This will fund salaries for at least 139 teachers and other resources.

Funding to school boards for 2017–18 reflects teacher salary and benefit costs[1] for eight months (from August 1 to March 31), given the province's fiscal year end at March 31. The funding summary on the following page shows part-year costs for 2017–18 and full-year costs for 2018–19.

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[1] Budget numbers are estimates only, calculated using an average of $75,000 plus benefits, e.g., pension contributions, health premiums, Employment Insurance benefits, etc. Actual expenditures will be tracked. If actual costs are less than budgeted, that money will be returned to the council budget.

Recommendations	Number of Teachers/Resources	2017–18 Cost (Aug. 1–Mar. 31)	2018–2019 Cost (full-year)
Class cap of 28 (+2) for junior high/middle school	49 teachers	$2.9M	$4.4M
Class cap of 30 (+2) for high school	50 teachers	$3M	$4.5M
40 teachers for junior high/middle school pilot project to help math and literacy teachers with the most complex classrooms	40 teachers	$2.4M	To be determined based on pilot project
Pilot project to provide $50,000 grants for up to 40 priority schools with the most complex classrooms[2]	Resources to be determined based on plans submitted to a council-appointed working group	$1M council funding $1M requested from EECD	To be determined based on pilot project
Subtotal:	**139 teachers, plus teachers or other resources based on needs identified by priority schools**	**$9.3M, or $10.3M if matching funding requested from EECD is approved**	**$8.9M**
Yet to be allocated:	**To be determined**	**$700,000**	**$11.1M**
Total:	**139+**	**$10M, or $11M with matching funding**	**$20M**

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[2] Priority schools are those with provincial achievement results in literacy and math which indicate that additional support is needed.

Broader Engagement

Council members are committed to reaching out to as many classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators as possible to inform their recommendations and to build understanding of the intent of recommendations, once made.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: No clear process has been established for teachers and others to share views with and receive information from council members		
1. Establish a province-wide Google group. Teacher representatives have already set up a dedicated email address within their school board.	This will allow teachers who are interested to join, as well as leave, the Google group as they wish. Council can also seek input from Google group members through simple Google forms.	May
2. Share council agenda with all teachers and administrators at least one week in advance of council meetings.	This will allow teachers to share concerns and ideas with their board representatives before recommendations are made.	May and ongoing
3. Ask all who work in schools to put their names forward to be part of issue-specific working groups.	Some teachers who applied to be a council member have said they want to remain engaged, while some, such as specialists who were not classroom teachers, believed they were not eligible to apply.	The council has asked EECD to issue a call for expressions of interest on the council's behalf. Applicants will be asked to identify their school, their role in the school, the grade levels they work with, and their priorities of interest.
4. Ask interested schools to identify their top five concerns.	The council's mandate is to deal with systemic, province-wide classroom challenges.	Council members will ask interested principals to identify and submit their priorities.
5. Invite teachers and other experts and stakeholders to present to council on key issues.	Teachers and others working in schools have direct, day-to-day experience that can inform the council's recommendations.	Council members will identify and invite teachers, other experts, and stakeholders, based on agenda items.

6. Prepare and share a summary of discussions and record of actions following each council meeting.	Discussions and recommendations must be open and transparent.	Posted monthly at https://www.ednet.ns.ca/ classroomcouncil
7. Share information with principals and seek their direct input on key issues.	Principals' perspectives are key to informing recommendations to improve classroom conditions.	Superintendents may invite their council teacher representatives to principals' meetings. The planning team for Principals in Focus is being asked if they would like to meet with council members as part of their May agenda.
8. Engage parents, students, school boards, and advocacy groups on issues directly affecting them through school advisory councils, home and school associations, and student councils, and communicate directly with organizations and associations.	The council is part of the teachers' professional agreement, and council's primary mandate is to deal with issues identified by teachers, affecting teachers. A parent and student representative are on the council to share their perspectives, but some issues require consultation with more students, parents, and other stakeholders.	Principals will be asked to share information on key issues with school advisory councils, student councils, home and school associations, and other school groups they consider appropriate. EECD will support the council by posting information and gathering input to report back to the council.

Legislated Priority: Assessment and Evaluation

Assessments

Teachers' time is best spent on teaching, and every effort must be made to limit their administrative burden. Assessment for learning is an integral part of instruction, and monitoring student progress and reporting results must continue. However, this must be done in a way that benefits from the professional judgment of teachers and supports student achievement and accountability.

In November 2016, government and school boards suspended all provincial and school board assessments until further notice. At the council's request, EECD and school boards prepared a summary of these assessments and related reporting (including new assessments planned for introduction), along with timelines.

Recommendations (as previously reported following the March council meeting)	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Data is collected but is not broadly shared and not used in ways to help children identified as needing help.		
9. Require EECD and school boards to share EDI data with all early elementary teachers, and provide supports for schools which have a high concentration of children with vulnerabilities.	Early elementary teachers will have more information about their students, and children with vulnerabilities should get more support.	Early Years staff at EECD has begun discussions with school boards and will report back to council at a future meeting.
Problem: Teachers are in the best position to assess their students' progress, and additional provincial or board assessments take time away from teaching and learning.		
10. End three provincially-mandated assessments and exams: ▪ Grade 1 Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement ▪ Grade 2 Common Math Assessment ▪ Math at Work 10 provincial exam	Teachers can use their professional judgment to decide how to assess their students in this area, preserving more time for teaching.	Effective immediately. Teachers can continue to access and use the Observation Survey and Grade 2 math assessment questions, based on their professional judgment.

11. Continue the suspension for this year (2016–17) of: ▪ the Grade 8 Reading, Writing and Mathematics assessment ▪ grade 10 exams	Teachers can use their professional judgment to decide whether they want to use the grade 10 exams.	Effective immediately. Teachers can ask their board math contact for grade 10 exams if they want to use them.
12. Direct EECD and school boards to present rationale for any assessments they wish to continue, eliminate or streamline so the council can make recommendations before any assessments are re-initiated next year.	This should result in fewer assessments, assessments administered less often (or at less busy times of the year), and less data entry. Results from those assessments that do take place must be shared with teachers as early as possible and used in ways that support student achievement.	A council working group has formed. School boards are invited to present their plans for assessments at the May and June council meetings.
13. Institute a five-year moratorium on any new board- or EECD-initiated assessments, unless proposals are submitted and approved by the council.	This should eliminate or limit the increases experienced in recent years in assessments and data entry.	Effective immediately.

Evaluation

Background Information from School Boards

Existing school board policies on late assignments and zeros reflect the following themes:

- policies recognize that student achievement should not be based on a single assessment, and students should be given multiple opportunities to demonstrate their progress.

- negotiated extensions on assignment deadlines are acceptable or expected, with some policies stating that extended deadlines are at the discretion of the teacher

- the use of "zeros" is permitted in some policies, but multiple steps must be followed beforehand to ensure all possible efforts have been made to allow students to show what they have learned

- in some policies, late assignments and use of "zero" grades are treated differently at different grade levels. For example, a grade of zero is only allowed in grades 7–12. At the P–6 level, a teacher would instead mark an assignment "incomplete."

The council also reviewed retention, or "no fail," school board policies. In brief, while none of the policies include a clear "no fail" directive, most recommend against student retention, i.e., repeating a grade. Most board policies state that students benefit from being in a class with their peers, in an age-appropriate setting. These policies include directives that:

- decisions to pass or hold back a student will be based on the best interest of the student, with proper supports in place and ongoing communication with the student and their family

- the final decision rests with the school principal

The council also learned that approximately 250 students were held back last year in grades primary to 9.

Summary of Council Discussion

Council members have said that school board policies do not reflect the experiences of classroom teachers.

On late assignments and marks, teachers are expected to mark assignments whenever they come in, and some teachers have been directed to give at least a minimum mark (e.g., 25 per cent) even when the assignment was not passed in.

Council members are concerned that policies and practices are limiting their ability to provide honest feedback to help their students learn, prepare to be good citizens with an appropriate work ethic and the ability to meet deadlines, and prepare for post-secondary education and the workplace.

On passing or holding back students, principals do not have the final say, even when they have evidence that the student has not met the outcomes needed to succeed in the next grade. If the parent disagrees, the board can overrule the principal's decision.

The council also held an initial discussion on report cards. Teachers, parents and students do not understand the rationale for changes over the past several years, and want the report cards to be easier for teachers to complete and for parents and students to understand.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: The education system has lowered expectations for students, limiting teachers' ability to prepare them for post-secondary education and employment.		
14. Ask EECD to develop draft policies that support ▪ assessment and evaluation ▪ promotion, retention, and acceleration The draft policies must support students' best interests, respect teachers' professional judgment, and address concerns around deadlines, use of zeros, and "no fail" practices.	This will enable teachers to use their professional judgment on how best to honestly evaluate and promote students and prepare them for expectations in the workplace, college, and university.	This should be considered at the May and June council meetings.
Problem: Report cards are time-consuming for teachers to complete and are confusing for parents and students.		
15. Ask EECD to explain the rationale for report card changes made over the past several years and present options to simplify report cards, including the option of paperless report cards.	Report cards should be easier to complete and understand.	This should be considered at the May and June council meetings.

Legislated Priority: Attendance

In May 2016, more than 3,500 Nova Scotians responded to a discussion paper on student attendance. Of that total, about 85 per cent say absenteeism is a problem. About 87 per cent were concerned that being late—even by 10 minutes—disrupts the rest of the class.

EECD statistics show that 28 per cent of all students missed 16 or more days of school in 2014–15. Absences were highest in junior high/middle school, with 37 per cent of students missing 16 or more days.

EECD developed a draft attendance policy based on this consultation. The council has reviewed the draft and formed a working group of four council members (with members from elementary, junior high/middle, senior high, and guidance). This working group has revised the draft attendance policy with the goal of ensuring that:

▪ there is a clear expectation that students will attend school, and that they will be held accountable for any absence

▪ decisions made by the school-based team cannot be overturned by the school board

▪ students and families who need support receive it

▪ teachers have the flexibility to use their professional judgment to respond to special circumstances

The council wants the policy to be in place for September.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Teachers and principals have waited a long time for an attendance policy.		
16. Request that EECD release the draft policy immediately to gather and return feedback to the council before the May 17 meetings, to communicate the policy to schools in June, and to take effect in September.	A lot of consultation has already occurred. Releasing the draft policy now is intended as a final system check before implementing the policy in September. The draft policy is also being shared with the provincial departments of Community Services, Health, and Justice to promote shared responsibility.	Feedback to be complete and returned to the council by May 9.
Problem: Principals have not seen the draft policy.		
17. Ask principals to share the policy with staff and school advisory councils and encourage feedback to council members or through the department's website.	The principals' voice in the final policy is critical. Having them, as instructional leaders in their schools, encourage feedback is important to inform council decisions.	Feedback to be complete and returned to the council by May 9.

Problem: Some children are absent for reasons beyond their control.		
18. Request that EECD and school boards bring forward research and best practices on outreach to families or other supports and accountability measures to increase attendance. This will help the council to discuss the potential of a pilot project.	Various models for support exist, and examining current research will help determine the right model to test in Nova Scotia. Strengthening these supports will also share the responsibility of improving attendance beyond the school and the individual teacher.	This will be dealt with at the May meeting.

Legislated Priority: Class Sizes

Teachers, parents, and students are concerned about large classes, with some high school classes approaching or exceeding 40 students.

Elementary Class Sizes

The council received information on class sizes and caps that have been implemented to date at the elementary level. The following caps were implemented for grades primary to 6 over three years:

- September 2014, grades P–2: 20 (+2)

- September 2015, grades 3 and 4: 25 (+2)

- September 2016, grades 5 and 6: 25 (+2)

In total, school boards received funding to hire about 300 additional teachers.

In some cases where class size caps resulted in split or combined classes, school advisory councils requested permission for the school to slightly exceed the cap in order to avoid the split. These requests were generally approved when school boards could accommodate them and the teacher and school advisory council agreed. As a result, around 4 per cent of classes exceed the cap.

Council members also are interested in lowering existing elementary caps. See Additional Priorities Identified by the Council.

Junior High/Middle and High School Class Sizes

Council received information on the costs of capping class sizes for junior high/middle and high school classes. Cost projections were developed by EECD in consultation with school boards, based on the number of classes that exceed potential caps in this school year.

Class Cap and Costing Options

Possible cap[3]	Number of teachers needed to achieve the cap	2017–18 (Aug. 1–Mar. 31)[4]	2018–2019 (full–year)
Junior high/middle school			
Cap of 26 (+2)	99	$5.9M	$8.9M
Cap of 28 (+2)	49	$2.9M	$4.4M
High school			
Cap of 30 (+2)	50	$3M	$4.5M
Cap of 32 (+2)	27	$1.6M	$2.4M

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[3] The Nova Scotia Teachers Union's current policy is that primary classes should not exceed 15 students, elementary classes should not exceed 20, and junior high and high school classes should not exceed 25 students.

[4] Budget numbers are estimates only, calculated using an average of $75,000 plus benefits, e.g., pension contributions, health premiums, Employment Insurance benefits, etc. Actual expenditures will be tracked. If actual costs are less than budgeted, that money will be returned to the council budget.

Very Small Classes

In developing estimates, school boards also reviewed the number of very small classes they now offer in high school. Boards report that they have almost 1000 (972) classes with 11 students or fewer.

School boards noted that they will need to continue some very small classes to ensure that students have access to courses they need to graduate. They can, however, make changes to the way courses are scheduled. For example, one board now plans to offer Mi'kmaq Studies every second year instead of every year. All students will still have the chance to take the course, and the class should have twice as many students.

This kind of scheduling change may free up teachers to reduce the size of larger classes.

Nova Scotia Virtual School

The council also received information about the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS), and heard how it can assist school boards in reducing the number of very small classes while maintaining student access to the courses they need to graduate.

NSVS currently offers 113 course sections. As well, some of the school boards' very small classes—sociology, computer programming, oceans, physics, fitness leadership, and tourism—are offered through NSVS. NSVS is also expanding its courses for French immersion students and for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate courses (IB).

NSVS is now hiring a teacher who will start next year as a student navigator. The navigator will reach out to students, understand the nature of any difficulties they are having with Virtual School classes, liaise with their teachers, and help them develop the skills they need to succeed in online learning.

Math Class Caps

The council received information on government's commitment to cap Academic Math 10 and 11 at 24 students. A shortage of qualified math teachers is delaying action on this cap.

EECD is taking steps to increase the number of math teachers. These steps include working with a university to provide a certificate and upgrading opportunity for teachers, exploring summer learning opportunities, and recruiting more teachers with math expertise.

EECD will act on the math class cap with school boards as teachers become available. Government remains committed to these caps, and the resources required to meet them will not need to come from the council's budget.

Summary of Council Discussions

Council members believe that very large classes are difficult to manage and should be consistently lowered across the province. They also believe class composition is just as important as class size.

The council recognizes that class composition is part of the work being considered by the Commission on Inclusive Education. As well, legislation prevents EECD and school boards from making policy changes relating to inclusive education this year, and in the 2017–18 school year.

As an interim measure, the council has recommended caps for junior high and high school, and additional teachers and funding to help support teachers in priority schools who have the most complex classrooms. Priority schools are those with provincial achievement results in literacy and math which indicate that additional support is needed. Council members would like to see further investment in these areas as funding becomes available.

Council also identified the need for continued action on elementary class sizes (see Additional Priorities Identified by Council).

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Some junior high/middle school and high school classes are too big.		
19. Set a class cap of 28 (+2) for junior high/middle school and 30 (+2) for high school.	This option will bring an estimated 99 teachers into schools, reduce the number of very large classes, and leave the council with funding for other priorities.	School boards are currently developing staffing plans and require direction on any staffing recommendations now.
Problem: Teachers in priority schools need more support to deal with complex classrooms.		
20. Provide funding to hire 40 teachers (to work in class or through pullout) for junior high/middle schools to support math and literacy in classrooms that have high numbers of students with special needs. Distribute funds so all boards receive some teachers • The largest boards, HRSB and CCRSB, will receive 8 and 6 teachers respectively. • CBVRSB and AVRSB will receive 5 each. • The smallest boards (Strait, CSAP, Tri-County, and South Shore) will receive 4 each.	This is an interim measure (a one-year pilot). Funding is targeted at the junior high level until council revisits class sizes, reviews the Inclusive Education Report, and considers the results of this pilot.	Evaluation should include detail from school boards on how funding was used and analysis of impact using existing data and data collection methods.
21. Create a $2M fund to enable up to 40 priority	This is an interim measure (a one-year pilot) to provide teachers who	The council working group must be created

schools with the most complex classrooms to submit proposals to a council working group to receive $50,000. Ask EECD to contribute $1M of the $2M. Some school boards already target funding to priority schools and are expected to work collaboratively with principals on ways to maximize all investments and the benefits the investments bring to students.	have the most complex classrooms with support until the Commission on Inclusive Education reports. This funding will allow schools to hire teachers to work in classrooms or individually with students; hire teaching assistants; or fund other supports and initiatives.	immediately, including council members and others appointed by council. Criteria must be developed quickly to allow principals to identify priorities, leading to hiring decisions before the end of the school year. Evaluation should include detail from school boards on how funding was used and analysis of impact using existing data and data collection methods.
Problem: The number of students on Individual Program Plans (IPPs) is unevenly distributed among classrooms. This adds to the complexity of the classroom, and is not in the best interests of the student or teacher.		
22. Direct registrars or others responsible for scheduling classes to avoid scheduling a large number of students on IPPs within one class.	This could more evenly distribute the number of students requiring additional supports.	Principals can lead in implementing this recommendation. The Commission on Inclusive Education could also consider this issue.
Problem: A limited number of online courses are available to CSAP and French Immersion students.		
23. Open courses offered by NSVS in French to both CSAP and French immersion students.	More online courses would be available to students in French immersion and in CSAP schools.	CSAP course outcomes differ from the courses in English-language programs. EECD should begin discussions with CSAP on how to resolve potential issues immediately.

Legislated Priority: Complex Classrooms

The complexity of classrooms is a significant concern for teachers. The council has received an update on the work of the Commission on Inclusive Education, which is expected to make recommendations addressing complex classrooms.

Commission on Inclusive Education

The mandate of the Commission on Inclusive Education is to identify creative and sustainable solutions to the challenges faced in delivering quality education for all students. The commission will make recommendations on an inclusive education model in which teachers feel prepared and supported and students feel a sense of belonging and are helped to achieve their full potential.

Council co-chairs have met with the commission, and the commission is on track to deliver its interim report on June 30, as required in legislation. The legislation also states that, except for changes recommended in the commission's interim report, the minister cannot change the Provincial Special Education Policy or any policies related to inclusive education until three months after receiving the commission's final report in March 2018. School boards are also not allowed to change any of their policies related to inclusive education.

This limits the ability of council to make changes relating to inclusive education this year, and in the 2017–18 school year. However, the commission wants to hear from classroom teachers and has asked to meet with the council in June. Commission members also want to discuss with the council how to continue exchanging information and seeking teachers' voices on inclusive education over the coming months.

The council also wants to make changes outside of policy to more effectively support students in the interim. Those changes include ensuring teachers have time to prepare Individual Program Plans (IPPs).

Time for Teachers to Prepare Individual Program Plans

The council reviewed information on the number of students on IPPs (about 6,400 out of a total enrolment of about 118,250); the average time needed to prepare an IPP (anywhere between two and ten hours, depending on the complexity of the IPP); and funding currently provided for release time for teachers.

The Teachers' Professional Agreement requires that a total of $750,000 be shared among all boards to fund substitutes for release time to allow classroom teachers to prepare IPPs. Based on the number of students on IPPs and the cost of a substitute, $750,000 should provide each teacher with a student on an IPP with a substitute for three hours. Despite this, many teachers say they get little or no time to plan for and write an IPP.

To explain why funding does not seem to match release time, the council asked school boards how available funding is spent.

Boards reported that they allocate their funding in different ways. Some allocate the funding for program planning team meetings, and not to individual teachers. As well, the funding is sometimes allocated for developing IPPs for students with the most complex needs—those likely to have larger teams and take closer to ten hours than three. This leaves less funding for release time for teachers preparing less complex but still time-consuming IPPs.

The council was given options to increase funding that would in turn increase release time. For example, increasing the $750,000 by 50 per cent would increase the *average* release time theoretically available from 3 to 4.5 hours for each student with an IPP. However, given most teachers say they aren't even getting three hours, this would not solve the problem.

As a first step, the council recommended ways to use existing funding more effectively and to dedicate time already available for professional development to preparing IPPs. The council recognizes that coverage of their teaching duties by subs to prepare their IPPS is not a sustainable solution to address the growing demands of their job. Council will address this with the Commission on Inclusive Education.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Classroom teachers have little or no time to plan for and prepare IPPs.		
24. Request that school boards re-examine how they allocate their share of the $750,000 currently provided, and manage these funds to ensure that teachers with more than one IPP are granted more release time.	Teachers will have dedicated time to plan and prepare IPPs.	Boards should review how they allocate funds before the end of this school year and put changes in place by fall 2017.
25. Direct boards to allocate half of the fall (September, October) PD day for teacher self-directed IPP and adaptation development. Give teachers the option to request more time if they have multiple or complex IPPs.	Teachers will have dedicated time to plan and prepare IPPs and adaptations. If any boards are currently offering more time, that should not be reduced.	This should be in place by fall 2017.

Legislated Priority: Data Collection and Reporting

The council held preliminary discussions on data collection and reporting requirements. These requirements are taking more and more time away from teaching, and their purpose is not always clear.

In its discussions, the council identified inconsistencies in the data collection and reporting requirements of different boards. Before making recommendations, the council wanted a clear picture of the range of—and reasons for—data collection and reporting requirements.

Based on this request, all school boards reported that teachers and school staff must collect data on attendance, adaptations, Individual Program Plans (IPPs), student assessments, assignments and grades, student health plans, and incident reporting. These data are reported through PowerSchool, PowerTeacher, Gradebook, or TIENET.

School boards also shared information on the data collection and reporting they require from schools and teachers for Student Success Planning and school board business planning, which draw on data from the Our School Survey, *Entendez-moi* Survey, provincial assessments, and school climate surveys.

Some school boards also require specific data collection and reporting related to the administration of special programs. Some examples include:

- Data related to participation and resource use for the Breakfast Club of Canada

- Data on independent/instructional reading levels

- Data on early literacy and early mathematics intervention

School boards reported that principals may collect additional data or may require teachers to report on additional data as part of school assessments and Student Success Planning. For teachers, it is not always clear whether data requests are coming from the school, the board, or the department.

Recommendation	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Data entry is taking more and more time away from teaching, and the purpose is not always clear.		
26. Form a working group to recommend ways to streamline data collection and reporting. Identify recommendations related to Student Success Planning as a first priority.	Teachers will have more time to teach.	Streamlining may include eliminating the data collection and reporting requirement in question or rescheduling it for a less busy time of the year.

Legislated Priority: Pupil Evaluation, Classification, and Administrative Days

The Collective Agreement (25.05) states:

> *Days pursuant to 25.04 shall, with the approval of the School Board and Regional Education Officer, be designated for use as follows:*
>
> *(ii) up to three days per teacher per year for such purposes as pupil evaluation and classification and administrative purposes.*

The three days are among a total of up to eight days in the collective agreement: up to three days for pupil evaluation, classification, and administration; up to two days for organization; and a bank of up to five professional development days.

Some teachers say they would like some or all of the three pupil evaluation, classification, and administration days moved so that they take place right before report card due dates. This is the practice in some, but not all boards.

To inform its recommendations, the council asked school boards to

- provide information on current scheduling of evaluation, classification, and administrative days

- provide the rationale for current scheduling

- identify any issues that could be created by a change

School Board Scheduling Summary

Scheduling of these days can change from year to year. This year,

- two boards will use two days at year-end and the third day in a variety of ways

- three boards will use the three days at the end of the year

- one board will use two days at year-end for all teachers, with grades 9–12 teachers receiving an additional day in early February

- one board has scheduled all days immediately prior to reporting periods, at different times for elementary and secondary

- one board will use one day at the start of the year, one at the end, and the third at the end of the semester or end of the year, for semestered and non-semestered schools respectively

In providing this information, school boards cautioned that it is difficult to build a "one size fits all" schedule. A school's schedule may depend on the grade levels taught, whether the school is semestered or non-semestered, and individual school practices and preferences. As well, if the days are not the same for all schools within the board, the board must pay to run the buses (e.g., busing costs CCRSB $50,000 a day).

Summary of Council Discussions

Council members feel that decisions on how to use these days must be based on educational priorities.

Given that evaluation of students is critical work, and that the three days were originally intended to give teachers time to complete report cards, these days should be protected primarily for this purpose. Halifax Regional School Board already does this.

While the council recognized that boards do not save on busing costs when some but not all schools are shut down, it encouraged boards to be creative in how they manage this. For example, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board used the elementary marking day as a professional development day for high school teachers.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Up to three days were negotiated into the collective agreement to give teachers time to prepare for report cards, but they are not consistently scheduled or used for this purpose.		
27. Require school boards to consult principals and schedule the days as follows: ▪ For elementary and junior high, two out of three evaluation days prior to report card due dates, and the third at the end of the year for year-end duties ▪ For high school, one administration day after January semester exams but before the report card due date, and two following the June semester exams	This will provide teachers with time for assessment, marking, and report card writing prior to report card due dates, while leaving one day for end-of-year activities.	Superintendents should be asked to consult principals immediately so changes can be made to school calendars for 2017–18.

Legislated Priority: Technology and Work Processes

Council wants government to listen to teachers' concerns with TIENET and PowerSchool, as well as their ideas on how to improve policies, practices, professional development, and support surrounding the use of these systems. Council also wants government and school boards to act upon the most common irritants immediately.

Ask the User Project

Recommendation	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: PowerSchool and TIENET were imposed expecting teachers to meet the systems' needs, instead of designing systems that meet the needs of teachers.		
28. Engage Service Nova Scotia to work directly with teachers and other TIENET/PowerSchool users to recommend changes, beginning with TIENET. These recommendations should address all aspects of the systems, including policies and processes, roles and responsibilities for related tasks, training, communication, implementation supports, and system changes.	Service Nova Scotia has expertise in action research and system design based on the needs of users, and will benefit from observing and listening to classroom and specialist teachers, principals, vice-principals, and administrative assistants.	Almost 570 people expressed interest in participating. About 100 will be selected. School visits are being scheduled for May and June. Some issues may emerge quickly and result in changes before the next school year. More significant changes will need to be tested with teachers in the fall.

Easing the Data Entry Burden: PowerSchool

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Publishing instant "in-progress" marks (or a rolling average) is causing confusion and anxiety for parents and students, and more and more questions for teachers.		
29. Issue a provincial directive permitting teachers to publish marks less frequently on PowerSchool at their discretion. Allow the school to determine when the in-progress mark is displayed, at least once a month. Develop user guides on in-progress marks and publishing grades to support board project managers, school administrators (and registrars where available), and teachers.	This is intended to give teachers more flexibility and reduce confusion and anxiety for parents and students. This will also reinforce assessment for learning Council clarified the intent of the March recommendation: ▪ teachers can still enter assignments and tests at any time, and teachers can see this information at any time ▪ parents and students will see assignment and test marks as soon as teachers choose to publish them, but the in-progress mark will appear only during a time frame or time frames designated by the school ▪ teachers will continue to follow their usual practice of providing feedback to students on tests and assignments as they are marked and returned	Recommended at March meeting. Became effective April 3, 2017.
Problem: Some boards require teachers to assign marks for every outcome. This is extremely time-consuming, with some teachers required to enter as many as 500 marks.		
30. Issue a provincial directive to end any practice that requires teachers at any grade to assign a mark to every individual outcome in PowerSchool.	This will reduce data entry time. Teachers will still maintain information on individual outcomes to support their instruction and communications with parents and students, but will not have to enter it in PowerSchool.	Recommended at March meeting. Became effective April 3, 2017.

Problem: Technology enables parents to communicate with teachers at any time of day, and parents often expect immediate responses that disrupt classrooms.		
31. Confirm with boards and principals that teachers can have up to two business days to respond to emails. Help teachers communicate this expectation to parents (e.g., on board, school, and teacher websites, in the September communications to families, in PowerSchool and iNSchool, and in newsletters).	Teachers will have fewer interruptions in their teaching day and will not be expected to respond to emails after hours.	Effective as soon as possible within the current school year.
Problem: When teachers record attendance at the start of a class, some are frustrated by having to reopen PowerSchool—sometimes multiple times— to enter attendance data for students arriving late.		
32. Issue a provincial directive so high school teachers may wait to enter attendance into PowerSchool until the end of the school day.	This is intended to give teachers more flexibility when they record attendance. The decision is left with individual teachers, based on their preferred classroom practice.	Recommended at March meeting. Became effective April 3, 2017. May be revisited based on feedback on the attendance policy.
Problem: A wealth of resources exists to support teachers in using PowerSchool and TIENET; however, these resources are so extensive that teachers find it hard to locate what they need.		
33. Create and promote short videos and user guides on key PowerSchool activities. Make them available on well-known, accessible sites.	To be useful, resources must be more accessible.	This should be completed from within the EECD budget.
Problem: Elementary teachers are unclear about whether they are expected to use GradeBook for more than report cards.		
34. Advise elementary teachers they are only required to use GradeBook for report cards. Additional use of GradeBook is at their discretion.	Elementary teachers will not feel pressure to use GradeBook beyond its use for report cards.	This clarification should be issued by EECD and school boards as soon as possible.

Easing the Data Entry Burden: TIENET

In response to recommendations from the March meeting, the council reviewed options to ease the data entry burden for classroom teachers by:

▪ sharing the workload for uploading documents to TIENET with school administrative assistants

▪ streamlining paperwork related to adaptations

Current laws and policies, including privacy laws, do not prevent school administrative assistants from electronically filing certain TIENET documentation. They did filing before TIENET, and can do so again if appropriate steps are taken to protect the security and confidentiality of the documents. This could include privacy training and confidentiality agreements. Highly confidential documents (e.g., guidance counsellor notes, SchoolsPlus documents) that already have restricted access would maintain the existing restrictions.

The council also believes teachers are expected to enter far more data into TIENET than necessary to effectively monitor and support students with adaptations or on IPPs. As one example, Stage 2 adaptations are not required by students at all times, and are part of good teaching practice. They may include a seating plan that minimizes distractions for the student, more time to complete assignments, larger text, or a buddy system. The current form for entering adaptations is lengthy and time-consuming to complete.

The council emphasized that streamlining of documentation must not result in less communication with parents. Records must be maintained to support communication, effective transitions from grade to grade, and other purposes. However, they can be maintained in ways that are more practical, less time-consuming, and give more flexibility to teachers.

Recommendations/changes	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Resource teachers are spending too much time scanning and uploading TIENET documents.		
35. Give administrative assistants access to TIENET to facilitate uploading of documents and reduce administrative tasks of teachers in a shared, collaborative way at the school level.	This would be a *shared* responsibility, recognizing that administrative assistants are very busy too. The goal is to give principals more flexibility in sharing the workload.	More recommendations on streamlining TIENET are expected through the Ask the User project.

Problem: Teachers are losing teaching time to data entry with limited value or an unclear purpose.		
36. Explore options for replacing the Stage 2 adaptation forms in TIENET with a more streamlined form or checklist, either in TIENET or in another form that is practical for teachers.	This is intended to keep a record of the adaptation and support parent communications while saving teachers significant time.	Refer this to the Ask the User research team to seek advice from TIENET users.
37. Share a user guide and short video with teachers and administrators on how to copy adaptations, IPPs, and other documents year-to-year in TIENET.	Some teachers and administrators have not been shown how to copy these documents and are entering data year after year.	Council members can promote the availability of the user guide and video.
Problem: The IPP process and associated paperwork is more complicated than necessary.		
38. End the requirement to record assessments in two places: in the annual student program log as well as at the top of the IPP.	This is a redundancy with no useful purpose. If the information is recorded on the IPP, it does not need to be recorded somewhere else.	This is a quick step, with more substantive change expected from the Ask the User project. This should be implemented as soon as possible.
Problem: Some students are kept on IPPs longer than necessary.		
39. Support teachers, other school professionals, and parents in the process of transitioning students from IPPs to public school program outcomes through the program planning process.	Many students benefit from IPPs throughout their school years. However, students who progress and can meet public school program outcomes should be transitioned from their IPPs.	The council will refer this issue to the Commission on Inclusive Education.

Additional Priorities Identified by the Council

Readiness to Learn

Council members have heard from many elementary teachers and principals that many children are entering school before they are developmentally ready to do so. This adds to the complexity of the classroom, not only in grade primary but in future years as well. Council says the contributing factors are the school entry age and the lack of a universal pre-primary program.

Recommendations	Rationale	Status/Additional Council Comments
Problem: Some children are entering grade primary before they are developmentally ready to learn and succeed.		
40. Request that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development explore ways to increase the readiness of children to learn and succeed when they enter grade primary. Consider: ▪ reinstating September 30 as the cut-off date to reach age 5 to start school ▪ creating a universal pre-primary program (play-based), including an Africentric, Mi'kmaq, and other culturally responsive programs	Either option could better prepare children to learn and succeed in grade primary, getting them off to a better start that will benefit them in future years.	Changes should be in place by September 2018.

Additional Class Size Caps, Teachers, and Other Staff for 2019 Collective Bargaining

The council also identified the need for more aggressive class size caps and additional teachers and other staff for elementary grades and in complex classrooms. Specifically, the council is asking the NSTU and EECD to consider the recommendations below in collective bargaining for the 2019 contract:

▪ Prohibit combined primary–grade 1 classes unless there are 10 students or fewer.

▪ Lower the grade 3 cap to 20 (+2), consistent with P–2 caps.

▪ Give teachers with combined classes extra time to prep for their extra grade level.

▪ Allocate additional FTEs outside of the Hogg school board funding formula to priority schools.

▪ Cap multi-grade classes (three or more grades) at 15.

Next Steps

Meeting dates for the remainder of the school year are:

- May 17, 18, and 19

- June 5 and 6

The council has not yet determined whether they will meet during the summer. For example, the Commission on Inclusive Education Report will be shared with the council on June 30. Based on its content, council members may choose to meet before September.

Meeting dates for the 2017–18 school year must be set by August 15.

Questions, Comments

If you have questions or comments about this report, email classroomcouncil@novascotia.ca.

Appendix A: Council Membership

Sean Barker
Elementary teacher, Strait Regional School Board

Mélanie Belliveau
Elementary teacher, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

Cheryl Bourque-Wells
Junior high teacher, Tri-County Regional School Board

Elizabeth Brideau-Clark
Junior high teacher, South Shore Regional School Board

Michael Cosgrove
High school teacher, Halifax Regional School Board

Melanie Morrissey
Junior high teacher, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board

Reagan O'Hara
High School teacher, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board

Kerri Lynn Power
High School teacher, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board

Rachel Ross-Mantley
Elementary teacher, Halifax Regional School Board

Pamela Doyle
Guidance counsellor

Amy Mackinnon
Parent

Myles Fox
Student

Sandra McKenzie
Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Council Co-Chair

Joan Ling
Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and Council Co-Chair

Appendix B: Terms of Reference

(Approved by Council, March 20, 2017)

Council Purpose and Mandate

The Council to Improve Classroom Conditions will identify and study teachers' concerns and make recommendations to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) and/or school boards on systemic demands on teachers' time that limit their ability to facilitate student learning and success. The council will also make recommendations on the expenditure of $10 million in each of fiscal 2017-18 and 2018-19.

While not limiting the council's mandate, the following priorities have been identified:

- Data collection and reporting
- Assessment and evaluation
- Feasibility of moving pupil evaluation, classification and administrative days immediately prior to report card days
- Student attendance policy
- Technology and work processes, including PowerSchool and TIENET
- Teachers' scope of practice
- Planning for student success
- Complex classrooms
- Class sizes at all levels
- Student discipline policies

The first five items listed above must be considered at the first meeting. The council must make recommendations on these same five priorities by April 28, 2017. The council must establish a process to identify additional priorities, provided they are systemic in nature. Examples may include identified trends and systemic issues from the Class Climate Review Teams and the Working Conditions Review Teams.

Council Membership

The Council is composed of 14 members:

- 9 teachers appointed by school board superintendents, considering cultural and regional representation
- 3 appointments from EECD
- 2 co-chairs, one each appointed by EECD and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) respectively (the parties to the Teachers' Professional Agreement)

The nine teacher members must include:

- 3 elementary teachers
- 3 junior high/middle school teachers
- 3 high school teachers

Terms are for up to two years.

Reporting

The co-chairs will jointly report the council's recommendations to government and the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union.

Facilitator

The co-chairs must annually appoint, by mutual agreement, a neutral facilitator. The facilitator's role is to assist the parties in effective dialogue.

The initial facilitator will be appointed as soon as possible following the establishment of the council.

The facilitator must be appointed annually by August 15.

The facilitator must attend all council meetings unless the co-chairs mutually agree otherwise.

Staff Support

EECD and the NSTU may each have one staff representative attend meetings to provide support. Additional staff may attend as needed or as requested by the council, with advance, mutual agreement of the parties.

Working Groups and Studies

The council may identify issues that require the completion of a study or the formation of a working group. Along with identifying best practices and research, this will allow the council to engage with more teachers, parents, and students; with other school professionals and staff; and with other education partners not directly represented on the council.

Any identified studies must be completed within six months of the issue first being discussed by the council or by a date agreed by the council.

Studies will be conducted by the council directly or by a working group struck by the council.

Meeting Schedules and Agenda Setting

The council must meet at least once per month during the school year unless the parties decide otherwise.

The co-chairs must set the meeting dates for each school year by August 15.

Once the council is up and running, the co-chairs shall set the agenda for each meeting at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

In its first year, the council must meet within 14 days of its establishment.

Meeting Rules of Order, Record of Actions and Decisions

All Council members are encouraged to speak openly and freely. Every council member's voice is equal in the room. To allow for this open exchange, meeting discussions must remain confidential.

NSTU and EECD staff representatives will collaborate on recording actions and decisions. Once approved by the council co-chairs, the recorded actions and decisions will be made public.

The council is expected to make recommendations by consensus, supported by the facilitator. Consensus decision-making can be defined as a collective decision arrived at through an effective and fair communication process (all team members speak and listen, and all are valued). Group members develop, and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole. Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favourite" of each individual. In the event that the council cannot reach consensus, recommendations may be made with the agreement of both co-chairs.

If the co-chairs cannot agree on a recommendation, the council may, by majority vote, request that the facilitator determine whether any dispute or barrier should be forwarded to an arbitrator. If the facilitator determines that all reasonable attempts to form a recommendation have been exhausted, the facilitator shall forward the dispute to the arbitrator on the terms set out below.

(i)   The decision of the arbitrator shall be final and binding upon all parties concerned.

(ii) The arbitrator shall not reach any decision inconsistent with the council's Terms of Reference, nor alter, amend, or modify any of the provisions thereof.

(iii) The co-chairs shall, within two weeks of the establishment of the Council and thereafter annually, agree on a list of three arbitrators.

(iv) The arbitrator shall be mutually agreed upon by the co-chairs from the list of three arbitrators identified in (iii), or if the co-chairs cannot agree, the arbitrator shall be chosen by draw from the list of three arbitrators.

(v)   The arbitrator shall not have the authority to create, change, alter or modify policy. Creation of policy is within the exclusive jurisdiction of the minister or school boards as appropriate. However, the arbitrator will have the authority to interpret or apply existing policy.

(vi) Matters referred to arbitration shall be heard quickly. Hearings shall be held or submissions received within 30 days of the referral. The arbitrator shall have full authority over the process.

(vii) The arbitrator has no authority with respect to expenditure of monies unless the specific expenditure proposal
   a.   was presented to the council;
   b.   the proposal does not cause the council to exceed any annual budget that may be established by the minister for the council; and
   c.   the specific expenditure proposal does not exceed $500,000 in a school year.

(viii)   The arbitrator shall render a decision within 30 days of receipt of submissions, or such other period as the parties mutually agree.

(ix) Costs of the arbitrator shall be shared by EECD and the NSTU.

Media Relations

Council members will nominate a media spokesperson or spokespersons at each council meeting. Other members who are approached to talk to media can respond or refer calls to the designated spokesperson. Media can contact either EECD or NSTU media relations staff, who will direct the request to the appropriate media spokesperson(s) in consultation with the co-chairs.

Appendix C: Additional Priorities for Consideration by the Council

This list was developed during a brainstorming session at the March 19 council meeting. The council will group and prioritize systemic issues from within the council's mandate, as well as additional systemic issues identified by teachers. Items related to inclusion will be referred to the Commission on Inclusive Education.

Council members also identified the need to consider these issues within a broader, holistic context.

1. School board governance
2. Prep time
3. Physical space (the classroom)
4. Inclusion: how implemented
5. Valuing process not just outcomes
6. Extra "staff positions" to help with wide range of issues
7. Resources to match curriculum for new initiatives—provide tools necessary (e.g., coding)
8. Mechanisms to support "Priority Schools"
9. Alternative schools/Africentric—consider other models (e.g., MK)
10. Combined class curriculum
11. Guidance—the role in elementary grades
12. Staffing formulas (Hogg Report), cost of educational assistants, ratio of guidance counsellors to students
13. IPPs—support and language used in the "form"
14. Accountability of school boards for allocation of education dollars
15. Availability of specialists (speech language pathologists)
16. Percentage of teaching time for vice-principal (VP relief)
17. Lack of French supports/resources available including for French immersion instruction
18. Modernizing current resources to support curriculum
19. Number of outcomes
20. Professional development for teachers on "school improvement goals"
    a. Content of professional development
    b. Instructors (instructor secured from California vs. using local expertise)
    c. Structure—organize to be role-specific (i.e., guidance, teacher)
21. Release time for teachers to attend to non-teaching related duties
22. Change in working conditions for music, gym, art teachers—required to serve multiple schools and other challenges facing circuit teachers
23. Sports, SIP and board policies, and field trips (ratios of teacher advisors to students, forms used, cost of transportation)
24. Increasing requirement of certain subjects at the cost of others (math vs. art or co-op)
25. Educational assistants vs. teaching assistants—role, numbers, and requirements for TAs, including consideration when transitioning students to community placements
26. Behavior guidelines and PLCs
27. Scope of work for skilled trade teachers
28. Lack of variety of Academic English Literature courses

29. International students—some do not have the language skills required for academic English; additional students added to the class not represented in staff configurations
30. Refugee students
31. Role of the principal as instructional leader