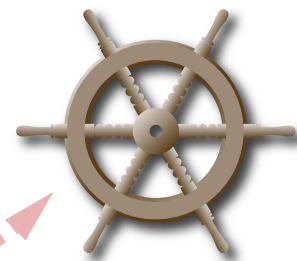


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## The TRANSformation of Equity in Schools

by Gérard Cormier, Executive Staff Officer, Outreach Programs & Equity Services

When looking back on Nova Scotia public school classrooms over the years, it becomes apparent that education about equity issues has undergone some major changes. It was not all that long ago when segregation existed in Nova Scotia be it based on race, gender, religion, or ability. Racial segregation legally ended in 1954, most religious and gender segregation ended in the late 1960s, and the 1980s saw the inclusion of special needs students.

However, it was not until the early 1990s when legal protection was afforded Aboriginals, gays and lesbians with changes to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

All of these societal changes are eventually felt in the classroom as schools are mini societies and as such are a reflection of them. Educators working within the system, however, had received very little to no education in some of these areas beyond courses in special education. Professional development opportunities were also limited to non-existent. Educators may not have had a direct voice in the societal changes that were happening but they were certainly expected to be able to deal with the issues that would arise within the educational setting.

Across the country teacher professional associations saw the creation of committees that would help educators deal with equity issues in the classroom. These committees had a variety of names such as Women in Education Committee, Diversity Committee, Equity Committee, Social Justice Committee, and Human Rights Committee just to name a few.

Their work was, and continues to be extremely important as they help create inclusive policies for their organization as well as provide valuable professional development opportunities and resources

for their members. For example, in 2009, the NSTU was the first teacher professional association east of Montreal to host a conference dealing with sexual minority issues in schools. It was entitled *Taking Pride in Equity* and was one of the most successful PD events to date. Finally, equity committees also monitor legislative changes that may occur, which may have an impact on education.

The NSTU Equity Committee is doing just that. In 2012, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was amended to add gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds in the Act. This amendment affords educators a valuable opportunity to assess and gain a better understanding of the needs of transgender students and educators and how we as an organization can attempt to ensure that transgender NSTU members and students have equal opportunity to education regardless of gender identity. This is extremely important work given that the results of EGALE Canada's school climate survey, *Every Class In Every School*, show that the instances of transphobia that transgender students face in education are even greater than the instances of homophobia faced by gay and lesbian students.

This past year the NSTU Equity Committee has been proactive on several fronts. Firstly, it reviewed NSTU Policy 19 Anti-homophobia and Anti-heterosexism and suggested amendments to the policy, which would make it inclusive of gender identity and gender expression. The amendments were sent to the NSTU provincial executive for their approval. At its February meeting the provincial executive accepted the proposed amendments and have sent them on to be considered by Annual Council in May. Furthermore, the NSTU Equity Committee will be instrumental in the creation of materials

that will be made available to NSTU members such as posters and pamphlets. Also, issues of gender identity and gender expression will be on the committee's radar as they plan the upcoming fall NSTU Equity Conference.

Finally, it should be noted that NSTU staff have been working on a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development committee,

which has been developing new provincial guidelines to be implemented in the near future. These guidelines will focus on supporting transgender and gender non-conforming students and staff in schools. The TRANSformation of Canadian society will be reflected in Nova Scotia schools and classrooms in part due to the above-mentioned initiatives taken on by the NSTU.

## Lieutenant Governor's Respectful Citizenship Award

NSTU Equity and Outreach executive staff officer Gérard Cormier attended the first Lieutenant Governor's Respectful Citizenship Award ceremony on February 26. He is shown with student members of the Riverview High School Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), from Coxheath, Cape Breton.

Of the 126 students nominated for the award, 68, both individual and as teams, were selected for 16 awards, two for each school board in the province. They were chosen by an advisory committee of representatives from the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Nova Scotia School Boards Association, Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations and La Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Cormier was the NSTU representative on the advisory committee.



From left to right: Charles Sheppard (Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board - School Services Coordinator); students Carissa Kauffman, Mitchel Hill, and Jesse Coulson; Serena Matheson (teacher advisor to Riverview GSA), and Gérard Cormier. Missing from photo: Students Jasmine Ho and Miles Virick.

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