Report of the Joint Committee

Established under the Teachers' Provincial Agreement, August 1, 2010 –July 31, 2012

6/25/2012
Joint Committee

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Background

As part of the Teachers' Provincial Agreement, the parties agreed to strike a joint committee with the following mandate:

> *The parties agree to form a committee comprised of three members appointed by the Employer and three members appointed by the NSTU.*
>
> *The mandate of the committee is to make recommendations to the Employer and the Union no later than March 1, 2012 or such a time as mutually agreeable to the parties.*
>
> *The committee shall:*
>
> - *Examine relevance in the assessment of learning (large scale tests) at both the Department and Board level;*
> - *Explore how redundancy in assessment of learning (large scale tests) can be reduced at both the Department and Board Level;*
> - *Determine the necessity of Accreditation/Planning for Improvement programs, specifically in light of efforts to promote professional learning communities that will, if successful, focus teachers and administrators on student learning;*
> - *Review the process of how new Department and Board initiatives and programs are implemented;*
> - *Review the process of how new technology or software is implemented. This shall include, but not be limited to, the appropriate in-servicing for affected teachers.*
> - *Examine what administrative tasks and data collection are unnecessary to student learning and can be reduced or eliminated.*

Dr. Alan Lowe, Senior Advisor Board Relations, Department of Education, Jim Rice, Director of Evaluation Services, and Gary Clarke, Superintendent for Chignecto Central Regional School board were appointed by the employer. Therese Forsythe, Marc Poirier and Ron Brunton, NSTU staff, were appointed by the Union.

The committee held its first meeting on February 20, 2012. Subsequent meetings were held on March 5, March 27 and June 7.

Proceedings

With the first meeting not taking place until February 20, the parties agreed the March 1 deadline for the report was unrealistic. It was agreed to attempt to conclude work by June 1, 2012. Unfortunately, this deadline was also unattainable and the deadline was further postponed to June 30.

Large-scale assessments

The Department of Education committed to reducing the amount of time spent by teachers and students engaged in the provincial large scale assessments. The Department also indicated it had successfully developed strategies with the regional school boards to eliminate the board-based assessments that duplicated the assessment objectives of the provincial assessments. The new assessment schedule will result in a reduction of time spent engaged in large-scale assessments, beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

The parties have agreed to the following statement concerning large-scale assessments.

> *The parties agree that large-scale assessment can serve a relevant role in promoting student learning provided such assessments adhere to the following principles[1]:*
>
> a. *They are criterion referenced with respect to the Nova Scotia Public School Program;*
> b. *They provide valid and reliable information about student achievement;*
> c. *They are consistent with the five statements pertaining to the development, administration, scoring, interpretation and reporting large scale assessments laid out in the Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada[2];*
> d. *The alignment with the written curriculum is assured by the participation of experienced teachers in the development of the assessment instrument.*
>
> *The parties further agree that appropriate use of the results of these assessments should include the following.*
>
> a. *The results are amenable to analysis and understanding through professional learning community practice so that they can inform instructional practice and strategy.*
> b. *The results are used in line with their assigned purpose of providing information on student learning with respect to the assessed components of the provincial curriculum.*
> c. *The results are used in conjunction with teacher-developed classroom assessment to:*
>   i. *Assist teachers to reflect on student learning;*
>   ii. *Confirm and/or raise questions with respect to judgements on student learning*
>   iii. *Provide an opportunity for the teacher to probe further to better understand the specific challenges faced by students and modify practice.*
> d. *The results are not used as the sole or the major indicator of student learning*
> e. *The results may be used to inform the system on curriculum, but are not appropriate to rank boards, schools, students or teachers.*

The Joint Committee notes that the redundancy of large-scale assessments has been reduced. The collection of provincial and board large-scale assessments will be regularly monitored to ensure they

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[1] The Statement of Principle pertains to large-scale assessments developed or purchased by the province and/or school boards, but not to national and international assessment programs agreed to by the Minister.
[2] http://www2.education.ualberta.ca/educ/psych/crame/files/eng_prin.pdf

remain relevant with respect to the purpose articulated above. Before additional large-scale assessment is implemented at the board or provincial level, it must be considered in light of the principles above and not introduce redundancy of assessment. The following table outlines the changes.

Former Assessment Programs								Revised Provincial Assessment Programs					
Assessment	Grade	# Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	HRSB	Province	Other Boards	Assessment	Grade	#Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	Province
ELLA	3	3	70	210	yes	yes		Reading and Writing in 3	3	2	90	180	yes
EEMLA	3	2	90	180	yes	yes		Mathematics in 4	4	2	90	180	yes
ELA	6	4	90	360	yes	yes		Reading, Writing and Mathematics in 6	6	4	90	360	yes
EMLA	6	2	90	180	yes	yes							
Grade 8 Mathematics	8	2	120	240	yes	yes		Reading, Writing and Mathematics in 8	8	4	90	360	yes
JHLA	9	4	90	360	yes	yes							
CAT-4 Reading	5	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Writing	5	1	60	60	yes								
CAT-4 Vocabulary	5	1	15	15	yes								
CAT-4 Mathematics	5	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Math Problem Solving	5	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Computation & Estimation	5	1	25	25	yes								

Assessment	Grade	# Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	Province	CSAP		Assessment	Grade	#Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	Province
CAT-4 Reading	8	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Writing	8	1	60	60	yes								
CAT-4 Vocabulary	8	1	15	15	yes								
CAT-4 Mathematics	8	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Math Problem Solving	8	1	45	45	yes								
CAT-4 Computation & Estimation	8	1	25	25	yes								
Mathematics 10 Exam	10	1	180	180			AVRSB TCRSB, CCRSB	Mathematics 10	10	1	180	180	yes
NSE Mathematics 12	12	1	180	180	yes	yes							
NSE English 12	12	1	180	180	yes	yes		English 10	10	1	180	180	yes
Total Admin Minutes HRSB				**2360**				**Total Admin Minutes HRSB**				**1440**	
Total Admin Minutes Province		**1890**						**Total Admin Minutes Province**			**1440**		

The changes for assessments with CSAP are:

Former Assessment Programs for CSAP							Revised Provincial Assessment Program for CSAP						
Assessment	Grade	# Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	Province	CSAP		Assessment	Grade	#Days	#Minutes	Total Admin	Province	CSAP
EAM1emCE	3	2	90	180		yes		Lecture et Ecriture en 3	3	2	90	180		yes

ELA	6	4	90	360	yes	yes		Mathematique in 4	4	2	90	180		yes
ARL	6	4	90	360		yes		Reading, Writing in 6	6	2	90	180	yes	yes
EAM2emCE	6	2	90	180		yes		Lecture, Ecriture, et Mathematique en 6	6	4	90	360		yes
Grade 8 Mathematiques	8	2	120	240		yes								
JHLA	9	4	90	360	yes	yes		Reading, Writing in 8	8	2	90	180	yes	yes
ARLS	9	4	90	360		yes		Lecture, Ecriture, et Mathematique en 8	8	4	90	360		yes
ENE Mathematiques 12	12	1	180	180		yes		Mathematiques 10	10	1	180	180		yes
NSE English 12	12	1	180	180	yes	yes		English 10	10	1	180	180	yes	yes
								Francais 10	10	1	180	180		yes
Total Admin Minutes CSAP				**2400**				**Total Admin Minutes CSAP**				**1980**		

Accreditation and Professional Learning Communities

The Education Act requires a process of school improvement. Section 26, Duties of Teachers, sub-section (1)(t) states that it is the duty of a teacher "to assist in the development and implementation of the school improvement plan" and section 38 (2)(m) state that it is the duty of the principal to "assist the school advisory council in the development of school improvement plans and, upon approval by the school board, co-ordinate their implementation". Similar requirements are defined for school boards, superintendents and school advisory councils. However, the philosophical core of the requirement for school improvement is to improve student learning and the Joint Committee recognized that the format and procedures of the accreditation model or Planning for Improvement were cumbersome and imposed a great deal of effort that did not necessarily or easily translate into an effective and efficient focus on student learning.

The Department of Education, in conjunction with the regional school boards, is in the process of restructuring the school improvement process to provide a more streamlined approach that enables schools to more effectively work toward improving student learning. The phrase "school accreditation" will no longer be used and there will no longer be a School Accreditation Program in Nova Scotia. The new adapted process will be referred to as "continuous school improvement", and all school boards will adopt this new framework. There are essential pillars to school improvement planning and the intention is to structure the plan and process in a very simplified and manageable form. These changes are described in the Department of Education document "*Continuous School Improvement: The Transition from School Accreditation to a Learning Community Approach to School Improvement*".

The Joint Committee agreed that school improvement process is consistent with and is best achievable when conducted through a professional learning community framework. The structure of this framework is defined for the Nova Scotia context in the *Report of the Professional Learning Community Study Committee.*

The Joint Committee developed the following statement of agreement concerning school improvement and the link with professional learning communities.

> *The parties agree to a commitment to continuous school improvement. The Department and school boards are committed to a streamlined and flexible process that acknowledges the individual school's context. The new process will be implemented with the 2012-2013 school year and schools already engaged with the accreditation process will be able to adopt this new approach.*

> *The parties agree that the school improvement process, now referred to as "continuous school improvement", flows from and is a framework for professional learning communities. School improvement is an evidence-based, whole-school framework that should be understood and is*

8

best realized through effective professional learning community activity as described in the Report of the Professional Learning Communities Study Committee.

The parties also agree to review the effectiveness of the proposed changes to the school improvement process prior to the 2013-2014 school year.

New Initiatives and programs

It is clear there is no single perspective concerning new initiatives and new programs. Many teachers and administrators are asking for new approaches to student learning that include curriculum redesign, curriculum support, new pedagogical approaches such as for assessment and differentiated instruction, new technology for engaging students, new technology for streamlining recording and reporting, citizenship and effective behaviour strategies. Two important threads emerged in the discussion. The first is that there must be a better process to clarify how new initiatives and programs are not additions to current work, but replace previous practice. The second thread is that support for teachers must be differentiated. Just as we expect teachers to deliver differentiated lessons to students, teachers themselves need the support for initiatives and programs that fits their level of understanding and background.

The Joint Committee believes:

Support for Department and school board initiatives must recognize that teachers are adult learners with diverse backgrounds and learning needs. Professional development in support of initiatives must be responsive to the individual needs of teachers, effectively resourced and on-going. It must provide for continuous professional growth as well as recognizing changing assignments and staff composition.

Technology and Software

It is evident that the problems associated with the introduction of the Student Information System highlight the need for support modeled on the principles set out above for initiatives and programs. There are teachers who have found the SIS intuitive and straight-forward. There are teachers who find the SIS to be exactly the opposite. There are also teachers who lack basic technology skills. One support plan does not fit all three contexts. The support needed for those having a high comfort level with the system is dramatically different from those unsure how to copy and paste text from one field to another.

Similarly, the use of technology like Smart boards requires differentiated support that recognizes the curriculum context, general technological literacy and the previous experience with this technology.

The introduction of new technology and/or software will only be effective if accompanied by meaningful and appropriate support. The level of support for all future technology and software introduction must always recognize the learning needs of individual teachers.

Administrative tasks and data collection

It is acknowledged that information about student learning and system structure is necessary for effective teaching and learning and for reporting to boards, the Department, the public and to students and teachers themselves. It is further recognized that the actual collection of information may shift focus away from teaching and learning.

The Department of Education is committed to reducing the paperwork required of teachers and administrators. Current initiatives, specifically the Student Information System (SIS) and the employment records management systems (SAP) have resulted in a diminished requirement for separate and often redundant data collection and it is anticipated that further reduction in data collection tasks will occur as the systems become more fully functional.

It is noted that the following data collection tasks have been or will be reduced or eliminated.

1. The statement of days taught and claimed is now processed through SAP and does not require teachers to complete these forms.
2. The classes taught process has been automated through the Student Information System.
3. Through PowerSchool and TIENET, the amount of information required to be collected or compiled by teachers and administrators for boards and the Department has been or will be reduced.
   a. Enrolment information can be obtained through SIS without specific requests to teachers or administrators.
   b. Class composition will be available, particularly with the implementation of TIENET, from the SIS system.
   c. Similarly, the number of Individual Program Plans will be available through PowerSchool and TIENET without requiring data collection or reporting from classroom teachers.
   d. Student demographic information will be available through SIS and only require relatively minimal maintenance to keep it current.
4. Changes to the school improvement process will reduce the amount of data collection required.
5. Custom SIS reports can be requested by principals or board personnel to address school or system questions without requiring additional work on the part of teachers to collect information. As the number of custom reports grows, they will be shared among principals to reduce duplication.

On an on-going basis, the boards, Union and Department need to receive information from teachers and administrators about what data collection and paperwork is problematic in order to determine if any these tasks are unnecessary to student learning and therefore reduced or eliminated, and whether data collection tasks that are necessary can be reduced or streamlined through the Student Information System.

Follow-up

The parties recognize the importance of engaging in an on-going review of the progress and success of the approaches and actions described in this document to determine whether issues identified in the mandate of the Joint Committee have been effectively addressed. The Union and the Employer agree that this will be done through the Professional Committee, which may review, or suggest the collection of, additional information.