
The Newfoundland and Labrador
Teachers' Association



Putting the Teacher Back Into Teaching

A Brief submitted by the NLTA to the Department of
Education and School Boards

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Introduction

Over the past several years, our province's teachers have brought forward, in increasing numbers, their concerns over what is happening to their roles as teachers in our schools. There is an amazing consistency to the issues being brought forward, from school to school and classroom to classroom around the province. Increasing demands being placed on teachers for the implementation of new curricula, modifying and adapting curricula, student assessment and student support services are all taking their toll. In response to the input and feedback received from members, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association has developed this Brief in order to bring the concerns and some recommendations to the attention of the Department of Education and school districts.

In analyzing the input received, we have come to the conclusion that a major part of the difficulty in implementing educational programs at the school level arises out of the disconnect between conceptualization and development of new programs and the issues involved in the implementation and delivery of those programs. We are not, for the most part, engaged in a criticism of the curricula and programs which are being developed and introduced. While suggestions for improvement are always possible (more so in some cases than others) there is generally a positive response to the changes which are being brought forward. Teachers' issues predominantly revolve around the implementation of such programs in our schools and classrooms. We are very concerned over the disjunction that we perceive exists between the demands of implementing/sustaining such new programs and the level of resources provided to meet those demands. Lack of supports, resources and time for implementation are having a severe and negative impact on our schools and on our teachers.

Within this brief, we have divided the input received from our members into five major issues as follows:

- Issue 1 – Curriculum/Program Introduction
- Issue 2 – Curriculum Resources
- Issue 3 – Student Support Services
- Issue 4 – The Need for Support Personnel
- Issue 5 – Communications

Following a brief analysis of the concerns falling under each of these issues, we have provided a number of recommendations which we believe would assist in alleviating those concerns for our members.

We trust that this brief will be accepted and given serious consideration in the spirit in which it is presented; that is, as an attempt to begin the process of addressing these issues. We pledge our fullest cooperation in working with the Department of Education and school boards in their attempts to address these concerns.

Summary of Recommendations

Issue 1 – Curriculum / Program Introduction

- 1.1 (a) That, at the district level, all areas (programs, personnel and support services) coordinate a proposal for new and ongoing initiatives that require significant teacher implementation efforts and other resources.
 - (b) That, at the Department of Education, all divisions (programs, testing and evaluation and student support services) coordinate efforts to prepare a proposal for new and ongoing initiatives that require significant teacher implementation efforts and other resources.
 - (c) That these proposals be submitted to the Professional Development Alliance which would be charged with determining a long-term (three-year) professional development agenda for teachers consistent with the PDA's proposed professional development model and which recognizes the resource needs, teacher workload, the balance between organizational and individual needs and the overall capacity of the system to absorb and to effectively implement the proposed initiatives.
- 1.2 That all districts have a program implementation specialist for early childhood/primary, elementary, intermediate, senior high, school development and special services.
 - 1.3 That all districts have a minimum of four additional program implementation specialists, to be allocated according to programs, funded by the Department of Education in addition to existing teacher allocations, and to be assigned based on needs defined by each district.
 - 1.4 That all districts be provided time for lead teacher secondment to support curriculum initiatives at the district level.
 - 1.5 That the Department of Education provide resources so that lead teachers can be assigned to each district, for all areas of the curriculum, to work with district level personnel on curriculum implementation issues.
 - 1.6 That the budget for substitute days allocated to school districts be increased by at least 25% for the 2003-04 fiscal year to provide an additional designated allocation of substitute days for professional development.
 - 1.7 That when any curriculum/program/assessment change is to be implemented at the beginning of a school year, teachers directly involved in implementing same will be provided with the necessary inservice not later than May of the previous school year.

- 1.8 That the Department of Education adopt as its policy that when significant curriculum change is to be introduced, all necessary documents will be provided to teachers at least one academic year before classroom utilization.
- 1.9 That the Department of Education fully pilot all new programs and courses before they are implemented by ensuring that all materials are piloted, teachers are in-serviced and appropriate materials and resources are available to teachers before implementation.
- 1.10 That when new curricula are implemented, a thorough piloting process be undertaken with adequate opportunities for feedback and input from piloting teachers before classroom introduction.

Issue 2 – Curriculum Resources

- 2.1 That a review of all course curricula be undertaken to ensure that adequate resources are provided to meet all course outcomes.
- 2.2 That, before any new course is introduced in future, the Department of Education ensure that adequate resources are provided to meet all course outcomes.
- 2.3 That the Department of Education investigate the possibility of reinstating “basic” and non-academic programs and courses for students who are unable to meet the outcomes of more academically rigorous courses.
- 2.4 That the school design and construction guidelines be revised to take into account current teaching practices and methodologies.
- 2.5 That the Department of Education seek input and advice from school administrators and classroom teachers before school construction and/or renovation plans have been finalized.
- 2.6 That every teacher receive, on average throughout an instructional cycle, a minimum of 60 minutes of preparation time during the instructional day.
- 2.7 That the Department, in consultation with school boards and the NLTA, revisit the teacher allocation formula for the purpose of putting in place a formula which provides sufficient numbers of teachers to deliver the prescribed program instead of the present per capita formula.
- 2.8 That, in consideration of the increased demands and expectations on our schools, no reduction in the allocation of teaching units occur until the above consultation and analysis has occurred.
- 2.9 That the Department of Education, school boards and the NLTA undertake joint initiatives to encourage and facilitate the sharing of teacher-made resources (e.g. supplementary materials, lesson plans, etc.).

Issue 3 – Student Support Services

- 3.1 That the Department of Education/NLTA Pathways Working Group continue to monitor issues around Pathways implementation, with a regular schedule of meetings established annually.
- 3.2 That the NLTA and the Department of Education host a series of focus groups to assess areas of success and challenge in the implementation of the Pathways framework.
- 3.3 That the Department of Education ensure that sufficient teacher units are allocated to implement the Pathways program.
- 3.4 That the Department of Education allocate teacher units for remedial needs.
- 3.5 That the Cascade of Services Model be accepted as part of the definition for inclusion allowing for a wide variety of placement possibilities, ranging from inclusion to alternate placements.
- 3.6 That a new formula be developed for the allocation of professional support personnel, which deploys itinerants, guidance counsellors and educational psychologists in a manner which recognizes factors such as geography, small schools and dispersed populations.
- 3.7 That the Department of Education provide funding to school boards for substitute teacher days to be used for the purpose of providing release time for teachers to attend to documentation responsibilities and ISSP team meetings under the Pathways framework.

Issue 4 – The Need for Support Personnel

- 4.1 That full-time secretarial units be provided in all schools.
- 4.2 That technical supports be readily available to all schools.
- 4.3 That teacher assistant positions be instituted to assist with non-teaching responsibilities.

Issue 5 – Communications

- 5.1 That the Department of Education initiate the publication of a newsletter directly to teachers for the express purpose of alerting teachers to specific issues and information which directly affect them.
- 5.2 That any Department of Education information or announcements concerning program implementation be provided to the NLTA at the same time as the information is disseminated to school districts.

- 5.3 That the NLTA be provided with a copy of any media releases/announcements from the Department of Education and be given an opportunity for feedback to the Department prior to media release.
- 5.4 That all program/curriculum implementation materials provided by the Department contain specific guidelines regarding expectations for implementation.

Issue 1 – Curriculum / Program Introduction

The Issue

The demands for change have surpassed the ability of the system to respond effectively. There appears to be little coordination both within and between agencies (Department of Education and school districts) so that at the school level teachers and students are overwhelmed by the magnitude and diversity of expectations for change - in curriculum, in assessment, in student supports, and in accountability. The result is a workforce which is demoralized and frustrated in their efforts to meet these expectations.

The Concerns

If we were to examine the outputs from the Department of Education to the school system in any given year, we would find that there are several diverse changes all happening simultaneously. Some of the change may be as extensive as the introduction of a new curriculum with all that that implies: new outcomes, new delivery modes, new forms of assessment, and new resources. It may be the introduction of a new policy or framework such as *Pathways* or *Kinderstart*. It may be the introduction of a new assessment, or battery of assessments such as the Grade 3 Criterion Referenced Tests, as part of a provincial or national indicators initiative. All such changes require the time and attention of teachers who already have an overly full plate of other equally important and demanding responsibilities.

This situation is further compounded by the fact that districts and schools, and the communities they serve, also have priorities. While most often they coincide with or complement Department initiatives, this is not always the case, resulting in yet another layer of demands being added.

While it can be argued that not all initiatives impact on all teachers, it is likewise naive to think that because a program may be targeted for a particular grade or course, its impact is isolated to those involved in that narrow band of influence. The Criterion Referenced Tests, for example, are meant to measure stages of achievement so that if we look at the CRT administered at the end of Grade 3, all teachers and students in grades K-3 are impacted by that process.

We want to make it absolutely clear that our concern is not necessarily a criticism of the nature of the specific initiatives. In fact, each and every one of these initiatives has its merits if evaluated independently and out of the context of the educational environment in which it is to be implemented. However, teachers work in that environment and we cannot ignore it. If we are to honestly assess programs and the ability of the education system to successfully implement them, we must measure their effectiveness in the context of the teaching and learning conditions into which they are introduced.

It is probably unreasonable to expect that those who are the authors and champions of new programs, policies and approaches would take responsibility for delaying or even interrupting their plans for implementation because other initiatives are simultaneously being undertaken. It is also unlikely that teachers are going to mount any great resistance, since everything is touted as necessary for improved teaching and learning. Who can argue against that? And, in any event, where would they find the time? Individual school boards are reluctant to speak out against or opt out of programs because they do not want to be seen as not keeping pace. In the end there is no gate-keeper. Instead, we are left with an open floodgate where everything passes through to the classroom. There is nobody or no group in the system consciously making decisions about accommodating the new and the necessary by making space through deliberate abandonment or modification of some of the existing programs. Simply speaking, the system is in overload.

While there are many, many factors which contribute to this whole situation, we will outline two of the most overriding difficulties surrounding program and curriculum implementation which negatively impact upon our ability to effectively meet the myriad of demands.

A. A Curriculum Development Model That Is Conceptually Sound but Practically Ineffective

The concept of a pilot is a good one but not if the pilot sites are so limited that we are not testing the curriculum in a variety of classroom/district contexts; and not if we ignore the feedback from the pilot teachers.

For a pilot to be truly effective it would need to be carried out in a number of districts and in a variety of sites. There is no such thing as a “typical” classroom in Newfoundland and Labrador. One cannot compare a large high school offering several sections of a course with a small rural school. In the first, a course is offered each term and often in more than one time slot. In the K-12 school, courses which are offered one term (or even in one year) are not offered the next as teachers attempt to provide choice and programming for students, and courses must often be offered in multi-course classroom situations. There are many variables in these differing circumstances – not the least of which are teacher workload and the amount of preparation time one can devote to any one course - which impact upon the course offering.

For the pilot to do what it is truly meant to do, teacher and student feedback would be valued and considered - even if it means slowing down an initiative. As one pilot teacher reports:

I feel I have been ignored in the decision-making pyramid while I have done mountains of work. The placement of unreasonable expectations on teachers to implement a process while at the same time ignoring their recommendations seems to me to be a formula for failure. We are expected to do the work but no one wants to hear what we have to say. At the end of the day it appears that I am required to provide a rubber stamp to decisions that are being made by individuals who are not in any way

informed as to the front line activity in classrooms. I believe firmly that if feedback and constructive criticism are not provided then we doom ourselves to constantly repeat our mistakes.

Currently we are so tied to implementation schedules linked to budgets and to partnerships with other provinces that by the time something is in the pilot stage, no matter what the feedback from the field, there really is no turning back. This totally compromises the validity of the process. We need to seriously deal with the concern that our Department of Education has lost the autonomy of decision-making about our own curriculum.

The examples cited with respect to piloting are just one area where there are problems. There have also been expressions of concern about situations where the recommendations of a Department curriculum committee concerning a new text are disregarded and a decision is taken for reasons that are not educationally sound; for example, the awarding of a publishing contract to a local company – overriding a decision to award the contract to a company with a superior proposal and a proven track record.

To add to the frustration, when teacher colleagues point out difficulties with new curriculum being introduced, they are quickly reminded that there was teacher representation in the development/pilot stage! Lest one should think that these are merely the laments of dissatisfied teachers, it should be noted that similar concerns were recognized by The Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery. In the report “Supporting Learning”, Recommendation 7 spoke directly to the need for greater support in curriculum implementation giving direction to the Department of Education:

That, when new curricula are initiated, appropriate materials be piloted, teachers in-serviced and materials made available to teachers for preview prior to introduction into the classroom.

This leads to our second major concern in this area.

B. Inadequate Professional Development Offerings and Opportunities to Prepare Teachers for Pending Changes

If a teacher happens to be assigned to a new course in year one of implementation, s/he may get a day of inservice. This only happens in the initial year, most often after the teacher has begun teaching the course, and even then with no provision for networking, problem solving, or ongoing consultation – unless that district happens to have a program specialist in that curriculum area. This last proviso is not an assumption we can make since the number of district office personnel have been greatly reduced and program specialists are, for the most part, assigned on the basis of “levels” instead of curriculum areas. This downsizing and re-configuration at district offices has led to a net loss of support – both in initial and ongoing professional development – and has undoubtedly compromised the effective implementation of new educational initiatives. In its brief to the Conciliation Board in January, 2002, the NLTA stated (Page 21):

The downloading of responsibilities and expectations as a result of school board consolidation and reorganization has filtered into every classroom throughout the province. The number of district personnel has been reduced significantly, however, those currently employed in the remaining positions are expected to do not only their own work, but also the work of those who have been removed from the system.

The model for inservice delivery is most often the “Train the Trainer” model whereby the few experts from the Department train a cadre of people at the districts (who we can assume are, for the most part, a little less expert) who pass on the training to the teachers in the field – who are ultimately responsible for the delivery of the program. Down the line, what the classroom teacher receives is his or her one day of inservice from someone who is transmitting information second hand at best. The agenda for the inservice is often little more than a catalogue of outcomes with very little attention given to resources, delivery strategies and assessment. In this framework, the cumulative effect of this uncoordinated effort is that few, if any, new initiatives are receiving the necessary and full attention to their implementation.

Since our concerns have led us to delineate some of the current factors which detract from an appropriate implementation model, it is only fair to acknowledge that there is a recent change which promises to provide a means of at least partially dealing with this issue. That recent development is the establishment of the Professional Development Alliance, as a result of Recommendation 45 of the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (March 2000). The Alliance can and should have a critical role in coordinating change so that it can happen in a sustainable and effective way. In the long run, the system will be more educationally sound, more professionally driven and, indeed, more fiscally responsible.

Coordination and collaboration are important, but they will not, by themselves, be enough to resolve the issues of implementation at the classroom level. We can, and we must, give more attention to the implications and expectations inherent in the introduction of all curricula, programs and approaches. We must take into account the full effects of such changes **at the classroom level**.

We have only to look at the difficulties encountered with the recent mathematics curriculum to realize that what might appear as savings with a less expensive text or a fast-tracked implementation process costs a great deal more in the end when additional resources have to be dedicated to dealing with problems that arise as a result.

Recommendations

Based on our identification of the main issue and our assessment of the concerns and context it is recommended:

- 1.1 (a) That, at the district level, all areas (programs, personnel and support services) coordinate a proposal for new and ongoing initiatives that require significant teacher implementation efforts and other resources.

- (b) That, the Department of Education, all divisions (programs, testing and evaluation and student support services) coordinate efforts to prepare a proposal for new and ongoing initiatives that require significant teacher implementation efforts and other resources.
 - (c) That these proposals be submitted to the Professional Development Alliance which would be charged with determining a long-term (three-year) professional development agenda for teachers consistent with the PDA's proposed professional development model and which recognizes the resource needs, teacher workload, the balance between organizational and individual needs and the overall capacity of the system to absorb and to effectively implement the proposed initiatives.
- 1.2 That all districts have a program implementation specialist for early childhood/primary, elementary, intermediate, senior high, school development and special services.
 - 1.3 That all districts have a minimum of four additional program implementation specialists, to be allocated according to programs, funded by the Department of Education in addition to existing teacher allocations, and to be assigned based on needs defined by each district.
 - 1.4 That all districts be provided time for lead teacher secondment to support curriculum initiatives at the district level.
 - 1.5 That the Department of Education provide resources so that lead teachers can be assigned to each district, for all areas of the curriculum, to work with district level personnel on curriculum implementation issues.
 - 1.6 That the budget for substitute days allocated to school districts be increased by at least 25% for the 2003-04 fiscal year to provide an additional designated allocation of substitute days for professional development.
 - 1.7 That when any curriculum/program/assessment change is to be implemented at the beginning of a school year, teachers directly involved in implementing same will be provided with the necessary inservice not later than May of the previous school year.
 - 1.8 That the Department of Education adopt as its policy that when significant curriculum change is to be introduced, all necessary documents will be provided to teachers at least one academic year before classroom utilization.
 - 1.9 That the Department of Education fully pilot all new programs and courses before they are implemented by ensuring that all materials are piloted, teachers are in-serviced and appropriate materials and resources are available to teachers before implementation.
 - 1.10 That when new curricula are implemented, a thorough piloting process be undertaken with adequate opportunities for feedback and input from piloting teachers before classroom introduction.

Issue 2 – Curriculum Resources

The Issue

Over the past five years or so, the educational system in Newfoundland and Labrador has witnessed monumental changes and shifts in philosophy, pedagogy, direction, and emphasis. As a result, the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the many educational providers have been drastically impacted and increased. Such shifts have resulted in considerable increases in teachers' workloads and responsibilities, changes to the instructional materials being developed and implemented (i.e. the curriculum resources), expectations that new methodologies and teaching strategies be adopted and implemented in the classroom, and a refocusing of the ways and means by which teachers prepare for instruction in today's very diversified learning environments.

The most notable change to the curriculum has been a significant shift from a textbook driven, content-based approach to a resource-based, outcomes-driven approach. The new philosophy, pedagogy and direction of the "new curriculum" has impacted dramatically on those who are charged with its implementation. The changes have resulted in increased workloads and expectations, as well as increased frustrations on the part of many of those who are on the front lines, i.e. our teachers in the classrooms, administrators in the schools and our program support specialists at the district offices.

This outcomes-based approach, coupled with prescribed resources ill-matched to the outcomes, insufficient supplementary resource materials, and insufficient time to implement the programs effectively, has created unmanageable teacher workloads, student and teacher frustration, and overall unacceptable strains and stressors on the educational system. Teachers have become developers of curriculum at the expense of their role as deliverers of that curriculum.

The Concerns

A. Inadequate Prescribed Curriculum Materials

A noticeable shift has occurred with respect to the implementation of curriculum in this province and the teaching methodologies and strategies to be used. No longer are teachers able to depend upon using a specified textbook or workbook as a reference or guide which covers the prescribed curriculum for a course; no longer does a single class set of textbooks meet the delivery demands of the resource-based program. Unfortunately, this shift has not been accompanied by the provision of necessary and adequate supplementary curriculum resources.

In nearly all cases today, the challenges of delivering an outcomes-based curriculum requires the classroom teacher to alter his/her approach to preparation from focusing on a

set of prescribed textbooks and resources, to referencing and researching a multitude of resources and supplementary materials as a means of preparing daily lesson plans to cover the expected course outcomes. Many of the currently prescribed textbooks and workbooks are inadequate for the prescribed outcomes, requiring substantial supplementary materials in order to ensure that the expected learning outcomes defined by the Department of Education are covered. For example, when the current elementary science program was introduced, the Department of Education recommended two textbooks: “Explorations” and “Innovations”. However, during the teacher in-service sessions which followed, it became apparent that neither of these textbooks satisfactorily covered the outcomes of the program in their entirety. It soon became a reality that when teachers were planning their lessons, they had to depend upon both textbooks in order to cover certain outcomes. This created additional work, further compounded when schools were provided with only one of the textbooks for student use. Teachers were given no choice but to supplement major portions of the program no matter which textbook was selected for use at their school since the student text covered only a portion of the outcomes prescribed.

As a further example, if we consider the present textbooks being used for Mathematics 3204 and 3205 in this province, it is again obvious that the textbooks prescribed are insufficient and require teachers to provide vast amounts of supplementary materials. The textbooks recommended for these courses by APEF were rejected in Prince Edward Island and replaced with what was seen to be a much more suitable textbook currently being used in Alberta. The Alberta textbook, in the opinion of teachers, better covers all of the outcomes and provides a far greater variety of practice exercises for students. Many mathematics teachers throughout our province are presently using the Alberta textbook to supplement those prescribed in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As a result of inadequate resources being prescribed for certain courses and programs and, in other cases, too much curriculum content required to be covered in the instructional time available, excessive demands and expectations have been placed on teachers’ preparation time. Teacher workloads have been stretched far beyond the limits of what is mentally and physically possible for any individual given the current allocation of human resources in the system. For far too many teachers, there is not enough time during the school day, or away from school into the evenings and weekends, to complete the lesson planning and evaluation required to satisfactorily deliver the courses and programs for which they are responsible. Most teachers are provided with minimal preparation time during the school day and the number of teachers with no scheduled preparation time whatsoever is alarming in many school settings. Attempting to complete the tasks of preparation, evaluation, reporting, etc., has become an overwhelming burden on teachers’ own personal time, adding to the overall frustration being experienced. Early “burnout” and stress-related illnesses have become more common with these increased demands. The demands of their teaching situations are requiring teachers to take on work schedules that deny them any time for personal or family life. As evidence of the negative effects, more and more younger teachers, and greater numbers of teachers overall, are seeking the services of the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers.

Teachers are required to research a multitude of supplementary resources, such as reference textbooks, magazines, newspapers, internet (if available). They must also assemble and photocopy sufficient copies of supplementary materials for all students in order to ensure that they cover the prescribed curriculum outcomes of the courses/programs they teach. **All this takes time**, especially when one is required to supplement in this manner **every** course or program for which one is responsible. For example, the preparation and planning expected of primary and elementary teachers who are responsible for the implementation of the Language Arts Programs in Kindergarten to Grade 4 are unrealistic and practically impossible. Teachers of these programs are required to test and determine the reading and writing levels of each individual child in class and place him/her on a reading continuum. A similar oral language assessment is required to be completed on each child to determine their language development. After these monumental tasks are completed, reading and writing materials and resources have to be reviewed and assessed in order to determine the level on which the resources should be placed on the continuum. This task is very time consuming since teachers are often required to read hundreds of small books in order to build up the resources necessary to meet the diverse needs of the students in the classroom. These responsibilities are overwhelming when the teacher is responsible for 25 to 30 students. (It must be pointed out that this demand is for only one program for which that teacher is responsible. The same teacher is also responsible for implementing the mathematics program, the science program, the French program, the social studies, etcetera, where the same group of students may have other recognizable difficulties.) Primary and elementary teachers are experiencing unrealistic demands on their workloads as never before. If teachers are to meet these expectations, they must be provided with more time away from the responsibilities of instruction.

A further compounding difficulty is related to the amount of content expected to be covered in some newer courses where changes in expected teaching methodologies and approaches are placing greater demands on the time available for in-class instruction. A prime example of this problem is the new high school mathematics program Mathematics 2204, 2205, 3204, 3205 and 3207. Even though some supplementary material is necessary for certain topics, the main factor affecting the teaching of this program is associated with the excessive amount of content in some courses. Most mathematics teachers would agree that the program and teaching methodologies are improvements over the program which it replaced; however, it is precisely because of the new concepts and methodologies that consideration must be given to reducing the amount of content to be covered. Even though the Department has had discussions and has attempted to address the concerns raised by students and parent groups regarding the inadequacies in the actual curriculum, not enough effort has been made to address teachers' concerns regarding the excess of curriculum content. Many mathematics teachers and program implementation specialists are very concerned that all the prescribed outcomes will not be met. As two of our teachers have stated:

Student performance on the mathematics public exam will not be a true reflection on a student's mathematical ability to learn and master concepts,

but more of a reflection on the amount of content that one is expected to teach during the school year.

The new mathematics program is really and truly a test to see how much material can be taught in a year, rather than how much can be learned by our students.

B. Budgetary Restraints

The stresses, strains and frustrations caused by insufficient curriculum resources and insufficient time have been exacerbated by other factors, such as budgetary restraints and the lack of financial resources to acquire necessary supplementary materials or to do such basic tasks as required photocopying. As a result of such restraints, there has been an increased need for schools and teachers to resort to fund-raising activities as a means of ensuring that materials and supplies can be purchased by the school and made available for the students. Having to resort to this “survival option” adds undue stress to the lives of many of our teachers, and places an additional financial burden on parents.

In many schools, teachers are informed early in the school year that there are photocopying limits which all are expected to follow, even those teachers who must prepare and deliver resource-based programs. Often, if such limits are exceeded, the school’s operational budget is negatively impacted and other necessary purchases must be placed on hold. As a result, it is not uncommon for schools to have to resort to fund-raising or individual teachers personally purchasing supplies and supplementary materials as a means of ensuring that resources are available to the students they teach. Recent studies indicate that on average in Canada teachers annually spend \$531 of their own money on classroom supplies and materials. The amount for teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador is \$485. These situations are unacceptable.

C. The Loss of “Basic” Educational Programs

Over the past several years, the Department of Education has phased out practically all “basic” and many of the non-academic programs and courses that were once available throughout many schools in the province. Courses such as Woodworking 1100, 2100 and 3100, Popular Mechanics, Basic Mathematics 1202, Consumer Mathematics 2202, Vocational Mathematics 3202, General Science 1205, Physical Science 2205, basic language, art, drama, music and home economics have all been replaced with a much more challenging and rigorous curriculum. As a result, students who are academically challenged are further challenged by the expectations that they are now required to enrol in the same courses as everyone else in their grade level. Many of these students, who once had many more choices, are being tested and placed on Individualized Student Support Plans (ISSPs) in order to ensure that their programs are modified to their level of ability.

Due to this change in philosophy, many academically challenged students are more frustrated with school than ever before; parents are frustrated with the school, the teachers,

and their children; and teachers are stressed and frustrated as a result of the additional pressure that this has created along with the additional workload as courses have to be modified or alternative materials provided for these students. As expected, many students express frustrations with failure or inability to cope; some become much more disruptive in class, lose interest and motivation to learn; and often experience a decrease in self-esteem because of their lack of success. The reality is that for some students, the only means by which they would have experienced some degree of success has been removed and replaced with a curriculum which is much more challenging and much more abstract than a “hands-on” learning environment. The only means by which these students will experience any degree of success is through considerable modification of their program by the teacher. With the removal of the former basic programs, have we really improved the possibility of success in education for those students so impacted?

D. School Design and Construction Often Not Conducive to New Teaching Methodologies and Learning Strategies

Even though the administrative and planning processes associated with school construction in the province has changed, there is little evidence that guidelines for construction have kept pace with the evolution of learning environments. (Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom, pg. 78)

In recent years, a number of new schools have been constructed and many more renovated in order to meet the needs throughout the province. However, “new” does not necessarily mean “better”. The Ministerial Panel Report in March 2000 recommended:

That the Department of Education review and revise all policies and procedures associated with school construction to ensure maximum flexibility and innovation in school design. (Recommendation 69, pg. 78)

It is very evident after visiting many of these schools and listening to teachers and school administrators working in these facilities that this particular recommendation has not been actioned by Department of Education officials. During the past year, officials from the NLTA office have requested a copy of the new school construction policies and regulations, but such has not been forthcoming.

The Ministerial Panel Report further stated:

As curriculum and the nature of schooling changes, teaching methods continue to evolve. The physical requirements associated with group work, learning centers and the use of technology to enable learning, therefore, must also evolve. Living and working space has a profound influence on attitude and productivity. Schools would do well to look to the successes of flexible learning environments which incorporate a variety of student needs and learning mediums. (Pg. 78)

Many of the concerns and issues raised by the teachers and administrators at these facilities have revolved around the inadequacies and inefficiencies of the structure and design of the buildings to accommodate the new teaching methodologies and learning strategies expected to be incorporated into the implementation of new curriculum. The regular classrooms and specialty areas of the schools are of insufficient size and thus very limiting to both the teachers and students during instruction and classroom activities. Smaller than normal classrooms limits the ability of teachers to implement group activities and to establish student learning centers. Teacher workspace and storage areas are often very limited to a small cubicle in the staff room or teacher lounge. For the most part, space in all of the new schools is inadequate and restrictive and does not allow for “flexible learning environments which incorporate a variety of student needs and learning mediums”.

Recommendations

- 2.1 That a review of all course curricula be undertaken to ensure that adequate resources are provided to meet all course outcomes.
- 2.2 That, before any new course is introduced in future, the Department of Education ensure that adequate resources are provided to meet all course outcomes.
- 2.3 That the Department of Education investigate the possibility of reinstating “basic” and non-academic programs and courses for students who are unable to meet the outcomes of more academically rigorous courses.
- 2.4 That the school design and construction guidelines be revised to take into account current teaching practices and methodologies.
- 2.5 That the Department of Education seek input and advice from school administrators and classroom teachers before school construction and/or renovation plans have been finalized.
- 2.6 That every teacher receive, on average throughout an instructional cycle, a minimum of 60 minutes of preparation time during the instructional day.
- 2.7 That the Department, in consultation with school boards and the NLTA, revisit the teacher allocation formula for the purpose of putting in place a formula which provides sufficient numbers of teachers to deliver the prescribed program instead of the present per capita formula.
- 2.8 That, in consideration of the increased demands and expectations on our schools, no reduction in the allocation of teaching units occur until the above consultation and analysis has occurred.
- 2.9 That the Department of Education, school boards and the NLTA undertake joint initiatives to encourage and facilitate the sharing of teacher-made resources (e.g. supplementary materials, lesson plans, etc.).

Issue 3 – Student Support Services

The Issue

Since the Pathways framework was introduced several years ago, NLTA has engaged in numerous discussions and initiatives with the Department of Education around issues of its implementation. Philosophically, NLTA has always supported the intent of Pathways with the understanding that a wide range of options, ranging from full inclusion to alternate settings, should be available for students with special needs.

The chief concerns around the implementation of Pathways have been related, in particular, to increased workload and the lack of supports required to ensure success.

The Concerns

A. Inclusion and Workload

The major concern which continues to be expressed by teachers is the intense workload associated with various aspects of the Pathways framework. Since Pathways is a proprietary policy, the allocation of special education teachers is carried out in a manner designed to ensure that the most serious needs are met before such personnel are assigned to meet the needs of Pathways 2 children. In practice this has translated into an increase in the numbers of Pathways 2 and 3 children who have all or most their needs met in the regular classroom. There are many examples which indicate that the classroom teacher has been largely or solely responsible for the delivery of modified programs to a number of children in their classroom. For example, a teacher at an inner city school in St. John's indicates that over one-third of her students are on modified programs, and there is little instructional assistance available from a special education teacher. In fact, of 26 students in a Grade 4 class, 11 are on Pathways 2, 3 or 4 and only 20 minutes per day of in-class assistance is provided by a special education teacher. In too many cases implementation and assessment are left to the classroom teacher, and it is becoming increasingly challenging to meet such diverse needs in a classroom that may have behavioural problems, large class size, or multi-age grouping.

With the increased emphasis on special services has come an increase in identified student needs. However, the support services of educational psychologists and itinerant teachers for the hearing impaired and the visually impaired are spread over very large school districts. This leaves teachers at the local level with identified needs among their student but infrequent support from overworked professionals with excessive case loads. This adds to the frustrations of our overworked teacher work force.

B. Documentation/ISSP Process

The amount of paperwork and the number of meetings associated with documentation are concerns that continue to be raised. Overall, the number of students for whom teachers are responsible results in a heavy workload with an enormous amount of paperwork. The workload is further intensified by the associated number of consultations with parents and colleagues. Furthermore, there still exists a lack of understanding of what is required to successfully complete required documentation.

Through the efforts of the Department of Education/NLTA Pathways Working Group, there have been improvements in many of the record keeping and documentation procedures. This Working Group has succeeded in streamlining many of the forms, and this has received a positive reaction from the field, relative to previous procedures. However, inconsistencies still exist around the province as districts are operating under different sets of expectations and time lines. As well, there is a fair amount of frustration from educators who engage in a lengthy documentation process, only to be denied student support services.

The ISSP process is a sound approach to integrating the services children require from various agencies and to defining a process for assessing needs and documenting programs to meet these needs. Of course, the ISSP process is one that requires a specified sequence of interagency meetings. For some educators, the number of ISSPs for which they are responsible can be staggering. For example, special education teachers can be responsible for many ISSPs, and some of our itinerant teachers can be associated with in excess of 100 ISSPs. The number of meetings and amount of documentation that this requires is, to put it simply, impossible to accomplish.

Although the ISSP process suggests that any agency or individual can be responsible for calling the ISSP team together, it is reported that it is most often the school that fulfills this role, placing responsibility on educators to call and coordinate meetings and to manage teams. Classroom teachers and special education teachers are being overwhelmed, both physically and mentally, by the staggering demands of this process.

C. Curriculum Modification and Development of Alternate Curriculum

During the past few years, the Division of Student Support Services has done considerable work in providing teachers with electronic versions of curriculum outcomes. As well, the forms developed by the Pathways Working Group have served to focus the process and to make it much more manageable. However, teachers still report that developing modified and alternate programs, which become part of the educational component of the ISSP, is a task they take very seriously, but one which makes impossible demands on time and intrudes in a major fashion on other responsibilities.

Teacher workload and preparation time have been seriously impacted by the requirement to modify courses and/or develop alternative resources/programs for students who have been tested and identified as categorical and non-categorical special needs students. Many of

these students have been diagnosed with identifiable learning disabilities and the classroom teacher is directly responsible for ensuring that all students are provided with ability-level materials. As a result, modified materials must often be developed by the teacher. These modified materials must ensure the integrity of the outcomes, as prescribed by the curriculum. This added dimension creates unmanageable and untenable workload situations for many teachers, especially when one has to complete such a task for every course s/he is teaching. It is not uncommon throughout our classrooms to find teachers who are required to supplement practically all of their teaching assignment in this way since the number of students identified as requiring such modifications has increased over the last few years. In many schools throughout the province, a significant proportion of a school's population has been diagnosed with a certain level of learning deficiency which requires some modification of materials from that which is appropriate for use with the majority of students. For example, in one school, 50 students out of a total school population of 193 required the development of a Pathway program (individual student support program) other than a Pathway 1.

It is unacceptable that in today's educational system, teachers still find themselves in situations with such unmanageable challenges and workloads when, in March 2000, the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom stated:

Given that multi-level and multi-course teaching is inevitable in many schools, and the method of choice in others, the curriculum must be designed to reduce the burden placed on teachers of having to treat a class as if it were several classes, each working independently. Whatever the merits of individualized instruction or within-class grouping, the Panel finds it difficult to support a system in which a teacher must prepare multiple content and materials for every class session in a multi-level situation. (Emphasis added) (Pg. 47).

Teachers around the province indicate that there is little clear direction regarding the extent and nature of the documentation for alternate curricula. In a number of schools, for example, considerable concern was expressed about the intensive work required, as well as frustrations when educators engage in a lengthy process to create an alternate curriculum which subsequently is not approved by the Department of Education.

Finally, many teachers still express concern over signing off on modified and alternate curriculum since they feel that adequate resources are not available to deliver these programs.

D. Meeting Remedial Needs

A long-standing concern with meeting the diverse needs of students, although not strictly a Student Support Services issue, is the lack of designated personnel to deal with what has traditionally been referred to as "remedial" students. These are students who are not on a modified program, but who are experiencing difficulties with some curriculum content.

The NLTA has consistently reconfirmed the following policy on remedial services:

1. Definition of Remediation

Remediation refers to particular instructional techniques that attempt to expose the learner once again to concepts and skills that were not adequately learned during previous teaching-learning experiences.

2. Considerations for Effective Remediation

- a) Remediation services should be recognized as a specific need in the education of certain students.
- b) Remediation should be recognized as being distinctly different from special education.
- c) Children requiring remediation should be recognized as Pathways 1 or 2 students who experience difficulties in learning which can usually be overcome by:
 - i) a concentrated application of specific needs instruction, or
 - ii) ongoing supports and accommodations.
- d) Remediation can occur in either a segregated or non-segregated environment depending on the prevailing circumstances of any particular class.
- e) Diagnosis of student difficulties should be based on an informal approach consistent with ongoing classroom evaluation and followed by individual student assessment by the regular classroom teacher.
- f) Remedial support should be determined by the assessed needs, interests and abilities of the student.
- g) Remedial support can be planned and delivered by both regular classroom and special education teachers, with the actual involvement of each teacher dependent on the requirements of the child.
- h) The delivery of remedial programs in the regular classroom must ensure that the instructional needs of all students are met.

During the past few years, the Department has introduced programs such as “First Steps” to address needs in the primary grades. These programs have been adequately in-serviced and well received. Although recent CRT results suggest improvements in most areas of reading, there remain many areas of need. For some time, the NLTA has recommended that teachers specifically designated for remedial services are required to provide the intensive early intervention needed to help these students succeed and to minimize escalation of frustration and failure. The resulting benefits to a significant proportion of our student population in terms of higher achievement and lower dropout rates would make this a valuable investment.

E. Student Assistants

In recent years, the Department of Education has increased the allocations of student assistants and has suggested that “no child who has legitimate needs should be without a student assistant”. However, as student assistants are deployed by school boards and scheduled within schools, there are still incidents where students with severe needs are without the services of a student assistant for part of the day. During these times, it is expected that classroom teachers perform the duties of student assistants. In some cases, classroom teachers feel they do not have the training to perform certain tasks. There are also times when certain medical needs cannot be met in the presence of other students, creating a situation where students may have to be left unattended while the teacher performs these procedures.

Furthermore, it is important that student assistant services be matched to the tasks required. Not always is this the case. For example, there are incidents where student assistants have incurred personal injury on the job and upon return to work are no longer capable of the lifting and portering required with their students.

Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Department of Education/NLTA Pathways Working Group continue to monitor issues around Pathways implementation, with a regular schedule of meetings established annually.
- 3.2 That the NLTA and the Department of Education host a series of focus groups to assess areas of success and challenge in the implementation of the Pathways framework.
- 3.3 That the Department of Education ensure that sufficient teacher units are allocated to implement the Pathways program.
- 3.4 That the Department of Education allocate teacher units for remedial needs.
- 3.5 That the Cascade of Services Model be accepted as part of the definition for inclusion allowing for a wide variety of placement possibilities, ranging from inclusion to alternate placements.
- 3.6 That a new formula be developed for the allocation of professional support personnel, which deploys itinerants, guidance counsellors and educational psychologists in a manner which recognizes factors such as geography, small schools and dispersed populations.
- 3.7 That the Department of Education provide funding to school boards for substitute teacher days to be used for the purpose of providing release time for teachers to attend to documentation responsibilities and ISSP team meetings under the Pathways framework.

Issue 4 – The Need for Support Personnel

The Issue

Schools are demanding environments and in the absence of support personnel, the expectations placed on the teaching staff are greatly increased. With the inclusion of children with special needs, with the amalgamation of smaller schools, with increased bussing distances resulting in more in-school lunch periods, with increased technology, with greater social demands being placed on the institution of schooling, teachers are having difficulty meeting, in a manageable way, all of the expectations that are placed upon them. In this new environment, having sufficient numbers of support personnel to carry out non-teaching functions becomes more and more imperative.

There is a need for an increase in the support staff allocations to our schools to allow teachers and school administrators to concentrate on their primary role of teaching.

The Concerns

The NLTA welcomed the opportunity to address the Study Group on Hours of Work under the chairmanship of Dr. Philip Warren in October 2002. It provided an opportunity to highlight the uniqueness of school environments and the needs for support services. Some of the issues raised with that Study Group continue to be of concern to teachers.

A. Secretarial Supports

The role of a school secretary is much more diverse than that of a secretary in other office environments. It is difficult for a school to run smoothly without this support.

Increasingly, school administrators are spending more time in classrooms teaching. Increasingly, our small schools are dropping below the minimum enrolments to avail of a vice-principal. Consequently, if there is not enough secretarial time in the school, the office must go unattended for significant periods of time. School security becomes an issue. People can enter and leave the building without anyone knowing. People visiting on business have no one to contact or they have to interrupt the teaching principal. Important and often emergency messages to the school cannot get through because there is no one to answer the phone. Most schools now have answering machines, but that does not solve this problem. A public building needs support services, such as those of a receptionist. However, like no other public building, schools are expected to function without one for major periods of the day.

The use of technology in schools has increased. Computerized attendance, accounting, word processing, e-mail, reporting of substitutes (and the list goes on) are all intended to simplify office routine. But, while technology has changed the way we work, it has not

decreased that work. In fact, in many ways the volume of work has increased. Schools are experiencing the same.

With the integration of special needs children, the demands on the system have increased. Whether it is typing reports, attending meetings, answering phone concerns related to a special need of a child or providing time to help a child phone home or take a medication, school offices are busy places. Principals and teachers cannot find enough time to do all these tasks unaided. Secretarial support can provide some of this relief to the teaching staff.

If teachers and administrators could be relieved of some of their non-teaching responsibilities, some of the workload concerns they presently face could be reduced. What are some of these duties? They include: banking, canteen cash control, selling books and other supplies, requesting and responding to requests related to cumulative records, ordering supplies, greeting visitors, responding to phone messages, updating WINschool or other computerized administrative packages, filling out substitute and payroll forms, accounting, word processing, filing, photocopying, responding to individual parent, teacher and student needs, giving care to the injured and sick and generally supervising the office area. Having a secretary to perform these duties frees the principal and teachers to do the duties of professional school leaders and professional classroom instructors.

B. Technical Support

With the increased reliance on computers and other electronic devices in our schools, there is a constant need for someone to fill the demands of trouble shooting and keeping things on-line. Often a teacher is designated as network administrator and if time is allotted to that person to carry out that function, it decreases the amount of in-class time that school has for student contacts. If no time is provided from the instructional day, then the workload of the assigned teacher outside the instructional day is increased.

As well, without someone to maintain the technical equipment, computer-assisted learning (whether researching, publishing, distance learning or any other computer-aided learning activity) is interrupted and instructional time is lost. If courses are going to be offered via computer-assisted instruction, or activities using computers are to be part of a course, it is essential that those computers be operative as close to 100% of the time as is humanly possible. In a period of increased accountability and performance appraisals through the various standardized tests in use, it is important that all children have equal educational opportunity. Maintenance of the technical supports to offer that education is essential. Therefore, non-teaching technical personnel are necessary in all of our schools.

C. Teacher Assistants

Classroom instruction is only one dimension of a teacher's role. Playground supervision, corridor supervision, lunch room supervision, bus supervision – all add to the overwhelming daily demand on teachers, resulting in little if any time free of student

contact time from the start of the school day to the end. A reality for many is that there is no time to eat lunch, to go to the washroom, to call parents, or just get a coffee. Having teacher assistants who do some of the out-of-class supervision and assist with tasks that are supplemental to teaching would make a world of difference to a teacher's work life.

Teacher assistants could also be used to help organize displays, set up labs and work centers, collect materials from the resource center and photocopy. This would also allow teachers more time for their instructional role. In the Report of the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom: Supporting Learning, the authors included as Recommendation 27:

That the role of student assistants be reviewed with a view to redefining a number of these positions as school-based teacher assistants with educational training and qualifications who can serve a range of educational and individual needs.

This would suggest that, like the NLTA, the Panel saw in their visits around this province a need for this type of teacher assistance if the classroom and the school are to function effectively. They too recognized that the responsibility of meeting the teaching demands of today's learning environment cannot be achieved without this type of support.

Recommendations

The NLTA believes that many of the issues related to the workload of teachers must be addressed through provision of support personnel to our school administrators and classroom teachers. To achieve this the following recommendations are presented:

- 4.1 That full-time secretarial units be provided in all schools.
- 4.2 That technical supports be readily available to all schools.
- 4.3 That teacher assistant positions be instituted to assist with non-teaching responsibilities.

Issue 5 – Communications

The Issue

The teachers of this province are a key audience for communication from the Department of Education. Unfortunately, there is, in most instances, a lack of direct communication to teachers about matters that affect them. While the Department communicates directly to school districts and, in some instances, with the NLTA or with the public, there is no direct communication from the Department to teachers in the field. Information is always relayed (or meant to be relayed) through some other intermediary. The resulting delays in communication to teachers or, worse still, receipt of that communication by teachers from some source other than the school board, when such information is about matters that affect teachers directly, is at best inconvenient and at worst de-professionalizing. Quite often, there is not only a delay in receipt of the information, there is frequently a distortion of the message. A teacher is like a child at the end of the line in the common “whispering” game where the initial message transmitted is nothing at all like the message received.

The Concerns

Excellent communication helps organizations achieve. Further, early and direct communication to those on the front lines allows them to become part of the decision-making process by providing an opportunity for feedback before decisions are actioned. A lack of such communication breeds a lack of trust and a lack of involvement as those responsible for actioning decisions are left to feel they have no role in the process that led to those decisions. This negative outcome is exacerbated when those individuals are professionals with professional training and experience that would provide legitimate and valued input into the decision. The NLTA has several specific concerns surrounding this issue.

A. The Need for Advance Notice of Impending Initiatives

Teachers must be included among the first recipients of information about impending innovations that will affect them. They should not be the last to find out, sometimes as late as the spring of the previous school year or even the fall of the school year of implementation, that there is a new program, a new approach, a new policy, a new curriculum or a new form of assessment being implemented. To quote one teacher, who expressed his concerns about lack of information provided to teachers regarding public examination format:

When attempting to prepare students for public examinations...it is imperative for teachers to be aware of the examination format in September, not to be given the format three weeks before the examination is to be written. It is equally important to have the course objectives finalized in September when school begins rather than to be in-serviced on

the revised course content in November....It is distressing as to why the Department of Education should be so indifferent with respect to their planning and foresight in communicating their philosophical changes of...course objectives and examination format.

As a first step to including teachers as professional participants in the change process, they must be part of the dialogue when changes are being first considered. Is the APEF **considering** a change to the elementary science program? Let teachers know! Is the Department of Education **thinking of** adjusting the high school mathematics curriculum? Tell the affected teachers! Invite their feedback and their ideas. Early communication is a key to teacher participation and empowerment, to re-professionalizing the profession. Teachers cannot continue to be left at the end of the line.

B. The Need For Direct Information to Teachers From the Department

The current communication link from the Department of Education to teachers in the classrooms operates through the school district offices. Unfortunately, as indicated in the introduction to this issue, this often results in delayed communication to teachers, different interpretations of the information within different school districts or (depending on when various school boards communicate the information to teachers) some teachers receiving the information from a third party such as a colleague in another district. Teachers are left to conclude that their role in the system is considered as being of little significance. Problems in implementation of departmental programs and decisions arise from these delays and different interpretations. For example, Kindergarten teachers and principals are left wondering “Is *KinderStart* a package of resources that we may (or may not) use to complement what we currently do? Or is it a prescribed program with a designated schedule and expectations for delivery that should replace what we now do?” High school mathematics teachers are wondering “What is a ‘companion document’? Shouldn’t I have received one by now? Where do I obtain it?” Teachers of students with special needs are asking themselves “What documentation do I need to provide? How much is enough?”

C. Mixed Messages

Official transmission of Department information is relayed through the district office, as noted above. However, the message received from the departmental documents and the interpretation of same within various school districts does not always coincide. This should not be unexpected when a single decision, concept or program change is communicated to eleven different organizations or individuals to be then further transmitted to the employees who are expected to implement same. A prime example of this is the recent *KinderStart* resources (program?). The approach taken to these resources and the message delivered to teachers differed from district to district. We believe that this was caused mainly by a lack of clarity from the Department. Different interpretations resulted at the district level, further resulting in confusion and frustration at the school and teacher level. Serious consideration has to be given to avoiding the mixed messages and ensuring consistent communication of decisions and expectations throughout all school districts.

D. Discussion in the Media

There is often too much discussion in the media pertaining to educational issues which directly affect teachers. Teachers are often not informed of these issues and developments before they reach the public through the media or other sources. While we do not expect the Department to control the media, the Department does have control over the content and timing of what it chooses to release to the media. There have even been situations where the Department's interpretation on educational matters is provided through a call to a radio "open line", and the interpretation provided is one with which many teachers and the NLTA would take issue. We have chosen, to this point, not to engage in that forum and would certainly prefer an approach whereby teachers and the Association are informed and consulted well in advance of any release to the media.

E. Information Flow Between the Department and the NLTA

The NLTA takes very seriously its role in representing teachers. There is a very basic need to ensure that information is provided to, and discussion is undertaken with, the various partners in education before announcements or releases are made. Information flow to, and consultation with, the Association must be improved. It should be standard operating procedure that any and all information from the Department that is expected to find its way to teachers or affects teachers in any fashion should be simultaneously provided to the NLTA office. We do not dispute the right of the Department and school boards to communicate directly with their employees. However, far too often the teachers' own professional association is left to hear of things secondhand through a call or a contact from a teacher who has a concern or question about a particular program, initiative or action of the Department. The Association is then left to try to seek out the information in order to obtain the necessary clarification and provide appropriate advice to its members. Quite frankly, that is unacceptable. This Association has always pursued its interactions with the employer in a very professional, open and forthright manner. We will continue to do so, and we firmly believe that a full and unencumbered sharing of information can only assist that process.

Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Department of Education initiate the publication of a newsletter directly to teachers for the express purpose of alerting teachers to specific issues and information which directly affect them.
- 5.2 That any Department of Education information or announcements concerning program implementation be provided to the NLTA at the same time as the information is disseminated to school districts.
- 5.3 That the NLTA be provided with a copy of any media releases/announcements from the Department of Education and be given an opportunity for feedback to the Department prior to media release.

- 5.4 That all program/curriculum implementation materials provided by the Department contain specific guidelines regarding expectations for implementation.

Our Recommendations And Evidence Of What Is In The Best Interests Of Students

This report has outlined our members' concerns about five issues challenging their efforts to provide the best possible education for our province's children. These issues include:

- a) Deficiencies in the Department's procedures for introducing new curricula aimed at improving our children's education;
- b) Serious inadequacies in the resources available to schools for simply carrying out their day-to-day business, quite aside from the resources needed for improving the standard of our children's education;
- c) Limited and inequitable support services available for our neediest students;
- d) The squandering of significant proportions of the school's valuable instructional and leadership expertise on routine clerical and administrative tasks which could be assigned to support personnel; and
- e) Inadequate communication between the Department and teachers hampering efforts to best serve our children's needs.

Our report has gone significantly beyond just the identification of these issues, however. For each issue, we have offered a series of recommendations for action, 33 in total. Three cross-cutting themes appear within these recommendations which have been the subject of considerable educational research over the past two decades. In this section of the report, we discuss these themes, their relationship to our more specific recommendations and the research evidence lying behind our recommendations.

The themes running throughout our report reflect the main elements of a widely endorsed framework for explaining differences in workplace performance. Developed most fully in the literature on organizational and industrial psychology (Rowan, 1996), this framework has been used in education contexts to better understand differences in schools' responses to state accountability policies (O'Day, 1996) and variations in the success with which schools implemented England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (Earl, et al, 2003).

According to this framework, variation in workplace performance (e.g., the effectiveness of teachers, the success with which government policies are implemented locally) is a function of people's capacities (e.g., instructional skills), motivations and commitments, and the nature of the conditions and settings in which they work (e.g., classrooms, schools). Relationships among the elements in this framework are assumed to be interdependent. This means, for example, that neither high levels of teacher capacity and low motivation, nor high teacher motivation and low capacity produce high levels of teacher performance; neither does high capacity and high

motivation in the context of poor working conditions. Furthermore, a dysfunctional work setting will likely depress initially high levels of capacity and motivation.

A. Teacher Capacity

(Recommendations 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.7, 1.9, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

A total of 12 recommendations in our report are concerned with maintaining and enhancing those individual and collective capacities of teachers needed to educate our children well. These recommendations are about ensuring that: schools have access to expert knowledge in key areas (1.2, 1.3, 1.4); teachers have opportunities to make use of their knowledge and skill (2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3); and opportunities are provided to upgrade such knowledge and skill as new demands arise (1.1c, 1.7, 1.9).

These recommendations arise from a substantial body of evidence demonstrating the contribution to student learning of:

- a) teachers' detailed knowledge about individual students (e.g., Berliner, 1986; Borko & Putnam, 1996);
- b) teachers' subject matter knowledge (e.g., Monk, 1994; Walsh, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2000);
- c) teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., Shulman & Quinlan, 1996; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Sanders & Rivers, 1996);
- d) teachers' skill in using a wide range of instructional methods or pedagogical practices (e.g., Wenglinsky, 2000; Ferguson, 1991);
- e) teachers' knowledge about teaching and learning (e.g., Ingvarson, 2002; Muijs & Reynolds, 2000);
- f) teachers' experience, a proxy for much of the tacit knowledge teachers use from day-to-day in their classrooms (e.g., Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996; Murnane & Philips, 1981); and
- g) teachers' verbal ability (e.g., Hanushek, 1992; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995).

Our recommendations about specialist and lead teachers are premised on the importance of having teachers, in the province's classrooms, with the knowledge and skill this evidence indicates is required to foster student learning. The same premise justifies our recommendations about teachers having the opportunity to use their capacities to full advantage.

Our two recommendations about the importance of professional development to further build teachers' knowledge and skill are also premised on the contribution of teachers'

capacities to student learning. In addition, however, these recommendations are justified by evidence that money spent on professional development is likely to have a more substantial impact on student learning than money spent on several other widely used alternatives (e.g., Greenwald, Hedges and Laine, 1996).

Not just any professional development for teachers will pay off for students, however, and a considerable proportion of the research on professional development has been aimed at determining the features of effective professional development. A recent review of this evidence concludes that effective professional development:

...adheres to principles that emphasize school-level control, focus on student learning and instruction, a commitment of time and resources to implement development over an extended period of time, and the development of [forms of PD which] engage teachers collaboratively rather than focusing on them as individuals. Effective professional development requires that continuous inquiry be embedded in the daily life of the school. (Reitzug, 2002, p. 235)

Professional development with features such as these lend weight to those recommendations in our report bearing on preparation time and workload of teachers. Clearly, without a moment to spare from students and routine administrative duties, teachers have no time to further develop the capacities needed to do justice either to their, or to the Department's, aspirations for future student learning.

B. Teacher Motivation and Commitment

(Recommendations 1.9, 1.10, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4)

Twelve of the recommendations in our report are concerned with maintaining and enhancing teacher motivation and commitment to student learning and to the initiatives undertaken by the province to improve the quality of education.

As a group, teachers are noted for exceptionally high levels of commitment to their students' welfare (Lortie, 1975; Dinham & Scott, 2000) and motivation to improve their students' learning. These commitments and motivations have an important bearing on efforts in schools to ensure that new initiatives from the province have their desired impact on student learning. We draw on two lines of evidence to justify the recommendations in our report that bear on our members' motivations and commitments. One line of evidence arises from studies of conditions which influence teachers' commitments to student learning, the second arises in response to socio-cognitive theories of human motivation.

Teachers' commitment to student learning. A large body of empirical evidence (recently reviewed by Dannetta, 2002) about different objects of teacher commitment (the school, the teaching profession, student learning) and the factors which influence them, identified four factors that influence teachers' commitment to student learning, in particular:

- a) perceptions of workload (e.g., Reyes & Imber, 1992);

- b) perceived task autonomy (e.g., Rosenholtz, 1989; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990);
- c) opportunities for professional growth (e.g., Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990);
- d) workplace conditions (e.g., Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

These factors overlap many factors we have already associated with teacher capacity and are touched on in recommendations concerning preparation time, opportunities for teachers to work together and the provision of adequate in-service education for teachers. Essentially, teachers' commitments are significantly enhanced by opportunities to do a good job for their students, including the freedom to decide how best to meet individual student needs.

Theories of human motivation. Contemporary socio-cognitive theories of motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Ford, 1992) predict that variation in teachers' motivation to act in some way (e.g., implement the department's new curriculum) is a function of three sets of teacher beliefs – beliefs about outcomes, capacity and context. There is a substantial amount of evidence justifying the application of this theory to issues of teacher motivation (Bandura, 1993; Ross, 1998)

First, teachers' motivation to act depends on the extent to which they believe that such action will help accomplish goals or outcomes that they personally believe are important. Teachers' motivation to act also depends on the extent to which they believe that they have the capacity to be successful in carrying out the action. Seven recommendations in our report are designed with these two sets of beliefs in mind (1.9, 1.10, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3). These recommendations concern the pilot testing of new curricula, informing teachers of new directions and providing opportunities for teachers to contribute to refining new curricula; each of these recommendations allows teachers to align the intentions of the provincial curriculum with what they believe is in the best interests of their students and to understand better how they might go about implementing the curriculum.

Recommendation 2.3 asks for the reinstatement of basic and non-academic programs on the belief by teachers that, under current conditions, they are not able to adequately serve the students who would benefit from such programs.

Teachers' motivation to act, thirdly, also depends on the extent to which they believe that the context in which they are working will support their efforts. Recommendations to allocate sufficient teacher units to implementing Pathways (3.3) and to provide for remedial needs (3.4), as well as to implement the "cascade of services" model (3.5) and provide better guidelines for implementing the provincial curriculum (5.4) all indicate what teachers believe would make their work context more supportive of the expectations others have of them.

C. Teachers' Work Settings

(Recommendations 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.9, 3.6, 3.7)

Ten recommendations in our report are aimed at helping to ensure that conditions in schools and classrooms at least do not stand in the way of teachers fostering the learning of their students; seven recommendations (1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.9, 3.7) argue for at least minimally adequate resources to do the job (time, curriculum materials and other resources); one recommendation (1.8) is for sufficient lead time to prepare for significant change; two (2.4, 2.5) point to the importance of suitable physical facilities; and one (3.6) calls for a funding formula that better recognizes the diversity of schools across the province.

Two lines of evidence are related to these recommendations. One line includes “production-function” research exploring the relationship between various “inputs” to the school (e.g., money, teacher qualifications) and student achievement (the major “output”). Results of this research remain somewhat ambiguous (e.g., see Hanushek, 1996). But relatively recent evidence reviewed by Molnar (2002) suggests that only those reform initiatives that actually cost more money to implement seem to make any difference to student achievement.

A second line of evidence concerns the debilitating effects on teachers' performance of unmanageable levels of stress, much of it due to the work setting. Our report points to the demands on teachers' already full plates of the time and attention that is required, for example, to implement well the new curriculum – new outcomes, new delivery modes, new forms of assessment, and new resources. Writing a new curriculum is a far easier task (not to mention much less stressful) than actually implementing it in a classroom so that students benefit from the changes the curriculum intends. And if it is not implemented well, why bother to begin with?

The new curriculum is just one of the demands on the work of teachers who are, at the same time, being asked to respond productively to new policies governing the provision of services to students with special needs, prepare for new provincial assessments, and cope with myriad local issues; all of this is to be done with fewer supports and resources. Taken together, as we noted earlier in this report, our members believe they are faced with “unmanageable challenges and workloads”.

These working conditions – and teachers perceptions of them – are exactly the conditions associated with high levels of stress, and in its more extreme forms, “burnout”. This is a condition not at all uncommon among teachers (Byrne, 1994) and those in other interpersonally intense occupations subject to chronic tension. Burnout manifests itself as a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Symptoms of burnout are organizational (e.g., increased absenteeism, performance decline) and personal (e.g., less commitment to and involvement in one's job). Teachers experiencing burnout tend to be dogmatic about

their practices, to rely rigidly on structure and routine, thereby resisting changes to those practices (1996, p.199-200).

In a review of empirical research, Leithwood, et al (1996) identified three sets of organizational factors increasing the chances of burnout. One group of factors is job demand; the chances of burnout increase as teachers experience excessive demands on their time and energy, when they encounter constant and severe student misbehavior, as role conflict and ambiguity increases, and as they perceive excessive pressure from others to change their practices. At least several of these conditions were very much on the minds of our members when we collected data for our report.

A second set of factors contributing to burnout is lack of social support. Chances of burnout increase as opportunities decrease for teachers to share professional experiences with colleagues, to problem solve together and to be recognized by their peers for their efforts and achievements. This evidence gives rise to our concern to preserve teacher preparation time and opportunities for collaborative work.

Organizational support is a third set of factors accounting for teacher burnout. Chances of burnout increase as teachers have fewer opportunities to change their assignments and as they experience hierarchical administrative structures which allow them little chance to participate in decisions about key aspects of their work. Burnout also increases when teachers find themselves without adequate physical facilities and access to support personnel, the focus of a handful of our recommendations.

Conclusion

Throughout our visits to schools and in conversations with teachers, school administrators, and program specialists, the one, all-encompassing concern that is expressed revolves around the demands which have been placed on teacher workloads as a result of massive changes and increases in expectations coupled with insufficient and inadequate resources. Teachers, for the most part, would agree that the changes to the curricula and programs which have been implemented by the Department of Education will, if given sufficient time and resources, improve the overall education system and provide greater opportunities for students. However, as has been expressed throughout this Brief, the system is lacking in the resources which are necessary to move it forward. We have come to a crossroads in the evolution of education in this province where it is necessary to undertake an assessment of the realistic expectations of, combined with necessary resources for, those charged with seeing our educational programs through to fruition. If the Department of Education expects the students of this province to be prepared for the challenges of the twenty-first century, a balance must be achieved so that appropriate, pedagogically sound programs and curricula are supported by the necessary human, material and fiscal resources. The recommendations provided in this Brief are intended to focus attention on that necessary balance.

We must undertake a realistic assessment of the resources required to successfully implement our educational programs at the same time as we are deciding to implement such programs. We must all agree that if we make a consensus decision to limit the resources we are willing to provide to our education system, we must also be willing to limit the demands we place on those responsible for its implementation. By giving the necessary attention to these issues of implementation, we will be able to ensure that we are “putting the teacher back into teaching”.

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