

NLTA ALERT TO TEACHERS

Dear Colleagues;

Over the past few weeks I have heard from a number of teachers and administrators regarding the new report card/rubric and Power School/Sharepoint, in particular the timing, expectations and lack of professional development related to the transition from e-reporting to the new system. The purpose of this email is to inform you of the issues brought to my attention and relayed to the District and to suggest actions to address future such demands placed on you.

A summary of what I heard can be found at the end of this letter.

I understand that 33 schools are using the new system this year – mostly in the eastern region. While I have heard from a significant percentage of these schools, I do not believe the concerns are isolated to them.

In the spirit of collaboration, I brought these concerns to the District early on, hoping we could find a resolution. At that time, the District committed to having District personnel look into these concerns with the hope they would be resolved. Based on further conversations with teachers and administrators, the concerns seem not to have been adequately addressed and the problems still exist for many.

While not the case for all, several administrators felt the approach taken by District personnel was more “blame and shame” than an attempt to solve the problems. Some felt they were being chastised for bringing concerns to the NLTA, while others were made to feel that they were the only ones having any problems. I have heard similar comments from teachers.

I informed the District of these new concerns last week. The District committed to having District personnel address them, realizing of course, that it’s too late to stop the report cards. I suggested a letter to teachers might be helpful. I hoped that such a letter would come from the Director of Education or, perhaps, the Associate Director, as this would have signalled the level of regard the District had for the concerns we raised.

To be frank, the recent letter from Mr. Paul House to principals and teachers was not what I was hoping for. In my opinion, the letter minimizes the concerns teachers have brought to my attention. During my

discussions with the District, I was repeatedly told the new report card was a draft and the District understood the dilemma teachers were encountering moving from a 5 point rubric to a 4 point rubric. I was also assured that the District would respect the professional judgement of teachers in using the new rubric and their interpretation of the descriptors. Unfortunately, Mr. House’s letter does not relay those assurances.

Possible Action

So what can you do?

1. Send me your concerns and I will forward them to the District – confidentially if you wish. You can do this in one or more ways:
 - simply reply to me at jdinn@nlta.nl.ca or telephone 726-3223 ext. 223 that the concerns I raised reflect your reality
 - if you wish, add your own concerns in point form
 - include the number of hours you have spent or anticipate on spending completing your report cards
 - write your own email outlining your concerns as a number of teachers have done.
2. If asked to attend professional development activities after the workday or as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting seek clarification on whether the professional development is mandatory or voluntary. If you are told it’s mandatory, call Programs and Services staff at the NLTA.
3. Request adequate professional development on this initiative during the school day so that the new report card/rubric can be properly implemented for subsequent reporting periods.
4. Should unreasonable expectations or timelines be placed upon you, a reasonable response is “I will do my best to fulfill the duties required of me, but if the Employer requires it to be done in a certain way, then I would like to receive adequate professional development and/or time to do so.” Request necessary leave.
5. Convey your professional concerns in writing to appropriate District personnel. Be sure to request advice from NLTA Program and Services staff prior to sending any correspondence on this issue.
6. When in doubt, contact our personnel in Programs and Services for advice and guidance.

In my visits to schools throughout the province, one common theme emerges. Regardless of their role in our school system, administrators and teachers are trying to meet ever-increasing demands with decreasing resources. The Employer has increased class sizes, cut administrative allocations, and refused to provide adequate resources to address the increasing demands of the inclusionary classroom. Our professional lives are busy and getting busier. I would argue that our education system performs as well as it does because of the professionalism of our educators. We make it work.

But we need time and resources to continue to do so. As educators we have a professional responsibility

to our students. And that means each of us must join with our NLTA to advocate for the resources (time, people, material) we need to deliver the best possible education to our students.

Take care,



James Dinn
President

Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

Concerns Heard

Demands on Administrators

A number of principals indicated that in-servicing has been minimal, inadequate, inconsistent or non-existent, and that they have been left to figure out the new system on their own – usually on their own time at home. Principals I spoke to indicated the necessity of them understanding the new system if they are to help teachers with problems as they arise. For a group of people who are expected to run our schools and meet the myriad other demands placed on them, in addition to being instructional leaders, it's been a steep learning curve.

During the last round of collective bargaining, your Association raised the concern that administrators are having increasing amounts of work downloaded on them. This is particularly troubling since the Employer felt it appropriate to cut administrative time allocations two years ago, and now feels it appropriate to download further responsibilities.

Principals I spoke to also indicated they were left to provide the in-servicing to their teachers.

Furthermore, they understood from District personnel that they would assume the role of “tech support” and serve as a “trouble shooter” for their teachers. This means being available in the evenings or during the weekends when teachers will be completing their report cards. It is my understanding that District personnel assumed this role in the past.

Principals should have been given adequate and timely in-servicing on the new report card system

if they are expected to in-service their staffs and should not be placed in a position where they have to in-service themselves on their own time.

Secondly, this in-servicing should have started well before the first reporting period. Teachers and principals alike deserve time to learn and master the new program with a reasonable level of confidence. If that were not possible at this time, maybe delaying it would be appropriate.

Thirdly, technical support needs to be provided by District personnel, especially for the hours outside the school day. It should not rest entirely on the shoulders of administrators. Yet again, a new duty has been downloaded on them that will require them to be available to teachers in the evening and on weekends.

Demands on Teachers

Teachers have also expressed serious concerns with the transition to the new report card system.

1. The timing of implementation of the new report card has placed unnecessary stress on teachers. Teachers have been evaluating under the 5 point rubric since school began in September. They are concerned how the conversion to a new 4 point rubric will impact what they have done so far. A PD day should have been provided, and in-servicing should have taken place in the first few days school was open. While teachers can read about the requirements of the rubric, the true understanding comes when educators have time to collaborate and discuss what the various descriptors and criteria mean.

2. The following are just some of the concerns heard so far:

- excessive amount of time required to complete report cards
- convoluted and vague descriptors not informative or meaningful to parents
- changing descriptors
- difficulty in making changes to comments
- report cards vanishing
- names of students from other classes and schools suddenly appearing
- resolving these and other glitches so close to the reporting period is creating undo stress

3. The new report card is an initiative of the Employer and is necessary for teachers to perform their duties. The District should provide in-servicing or professional development on the new report card and rubric during the workday. Teachers should not be expected to volunteer their time to do professional development essential to the Employer's operational requirements.

Unfortunately, as a result of the confusion this District initiative has caused, school administrators have felt forced to hold in-servicing and professional development on the report cards during or following staff meetings or after school. Please be advised that the Association's position is that such practices are an extension of the workday and constitute a violation of Schedule E of the Provincial and Labrador West Collective Agreements. Under Articles 28 and 16 of the collective agreements the Association and Employer negotiated a lengthening of the school year in 2002 to allow for necessary professional development. When teachers volunteer their planning and preparation time to allow for professional development needed to meet the Employer's needs, in excess of what is provided by the collective agreements, teachers are removing any incentive the Employer would have in negotiating further professional development time in the collective agreements. Whether they are called "information sessions" or "professional learning" opportunities, these after school sessions amount to professional development for a new report card being implemented by the District.