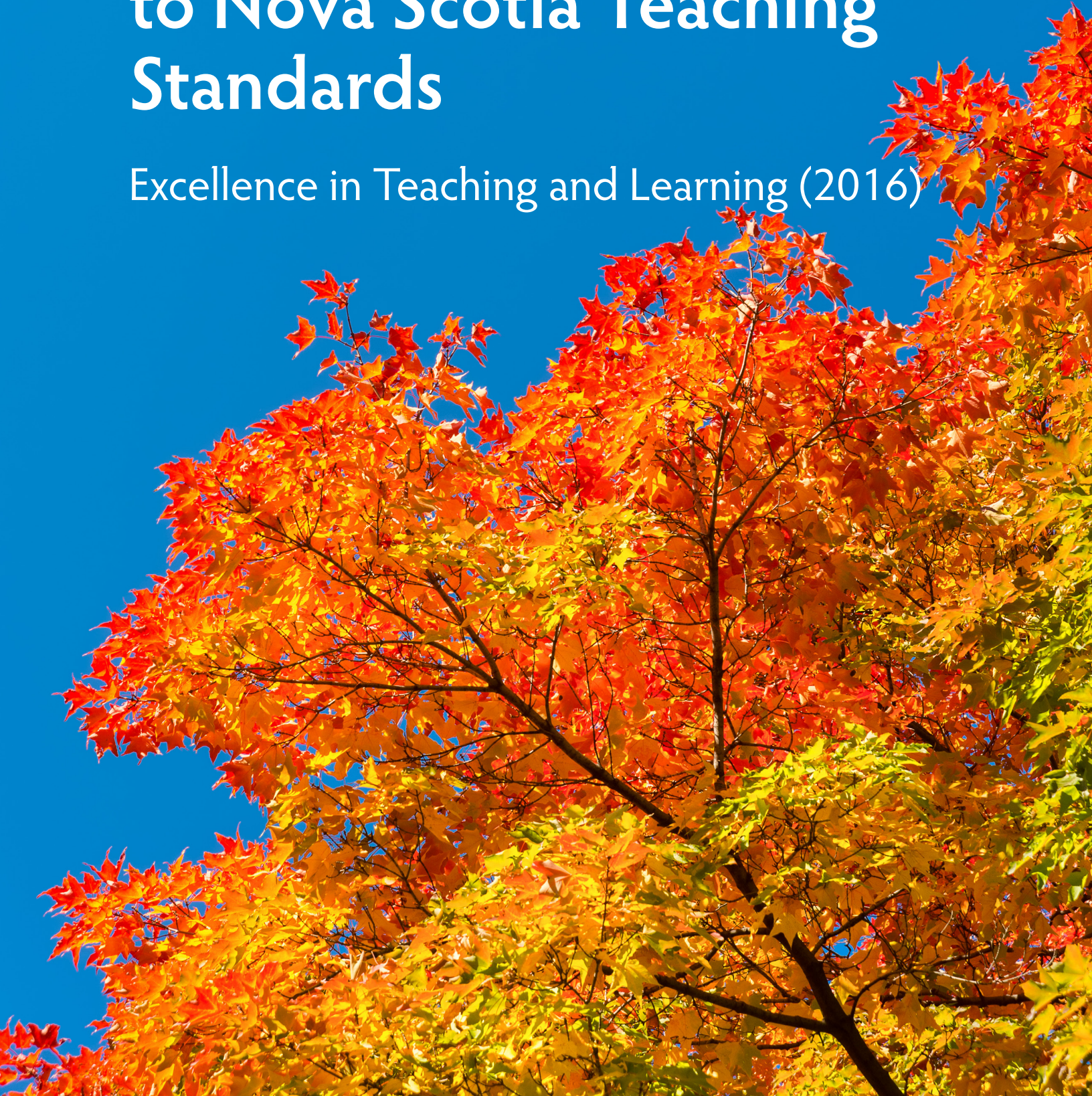


Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) Response to Nova Scotia Teaching Standards

Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2016)



Response to Nova Scotia Teaching Standards, Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2016

Introduction

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) has decided to adopt teaching standards as part of a comprehensive review of the Nova Scotia public education system.

“Nova Scotia Teaching Standards, Excellence in Teaching and Learning, (2016) states that the Standards will promote the teaching profession and heighten awareness of the vital role that teachers play in the development and learning of our children and youth.”

“The goal of the Standards is to facilitate increased student achievement in all areas, with emphasis in math and literacy, and increased student career-readiness.” (p.4) It is “a supportive framework dedicated to high quality teaching and increased student success...”. In the document, there is a commitment to “provide ongoing opportunities for input. This input will assist with the refinement of the Teaching Standards.”

In this first response, The NSTU will examine the Standards, the rationale for introducing the Standards the implementation process for the refinement of the Standards and the development of indicators. It is hoped that our questions, concerns and observations will serve to refine the Teaching Standards, the implementation process, and the performance management system derived from the Standards. The NSTU is involved in collecting data from members on their perspectives of Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia and will provide the results from that process of data collection in a response to be shared at a later date.

Background on Teaching Standards

The International Labour Organization (ILO) indicates that approximately 104 countries have established standards of practice for the teaching profession. It is important to note that the purpose of standards, their coverage and their link to qualifications frameworks varies across these jurisdictions.

If so many jurisdictions are engaged in defining and/or implementing teaching standards, one must examine the context in which this relatively new phenomena has developed. Global Managerial Education Reforms (GERM) have as their objectives improving country competitiveness by raising student performance and enhancing the efficiency of education systems. Policies generated from this reform agenda include: centralization, accountability, teacher performance and evaluation. Teacher performance is a key determinant of education quality and therefore, teachers are central to most of the policy development in education – what they teach, how they teach, how their teaching is judged, and how their value is measured. These reforms by their very nature will dramatically change the nature of teacher’s work, their sense of professional identity and the conditions in which they teach.

Teaching Standards are nested in this larger reform agenda comprised of declining support for public education, tighter control over using professional judgement in assessment and curriculum, intensified workloads and discourses of blame and shame. The competing and contested discourses of professionalism as status and recognition, as compliance, regulation, accountability and performance yardstick, are contradictory in nature, and lead to confusion, and misinterpretation. Bourke, Lidstone, and Ryan (2015) speak of the “colonizing of professionalism”, (p.77) and that the marketization of education has created a very overwhelming and complex space in which teachers exist. Anderson and Cohen (2015) discuss the expansion and narrowing of teacher professionalism and conclude, “they have more often tended to reduce it to work within an audit culture that requires being accountable to standards and criteria that they had no part in developing.” They also indicate that teachers are not involved in the conception of any educational initiative but are only deemed responsible for the execution. Evans (2011) paints a picture in her article

of “demanded professionalism” but advocates for a professionalism that is more intellectual and engages teachers in the emotional ownership of their practice.

The rhetoric around professionalism using Teaching Standards as a vehicle to increase the status of the profession must be clearly viewed as an external response to political, accountability and fiscal agendas. This is not about the profession establishing control over its discourse and practice in the vein of what Sachs identifies as “the activist professional (2003).” Anderson and Cohen (2015) speak of advocacy professionalism that advocates for wide participation in creating standards. This has not been the case in most jurisdictions where large numbers of teachers have either been marginalized or minimally engaged in determining the standards that they, as professionals, should adopt.

Acknowledging the origin of teaching standards, it is important to know if standards have fulfilled their promise. The results are mixed. Sachs and Mockler, (2012) in examining the Australian context argue that the operationalization of professional teaching standards has damaged teacher autonomy and professional identity”. (p.37).

*The currently popular teaching standards movement assumes that teacher performance will improve if only teacher capacity or **ability** changes. High-stakes accountability policies, especially those with a market orientation, assume performance will change if only teacher **motivation** changes. Both of these reform efforts often have been pursued within a less-is-more financial framework, the consequences of which have had substantial negative effects on teachers’ **working conditions**. (Leithwood, 2006)*

After analyzing the reform agendas of multiple jurisdictions where standards have not significantly improved educational outcomes, researchers conducting analyses in more successful education jurisdictions, are advocating an alternate route: that education professionals improve professional capacity at both the individual and collective level and accept responsibility for effective implementation of initiatives that seek to improve student learning. Where, in the discussion about which initiatives to implement that will truly maximize the full potential of public education, do we seek teacher voice?

Standards in Canada

In Canada, some provinces have created professional standards or are in the process of doing so. Saskatchewan is presently engaged in establishing Standards of Conduct. These standards focus on establishing relationships with students based on mutual respect and trust, having regard for the safety and well – being of learners, working collaboratively with colleagues and other professionals and maintaining good relationships with parents and guardians, acting with integrity and honesty, maintaining the quality of their practice and upholding trust and confidence in the profession.

Ontario and BC have standards of practice which are very similar in nature.

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) was one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to adopt Teaching Standards, a response to an accountability agenda and a government that was anti-teacher. The Ministry of Education of Ontario has adopted a combination of external accountability measures, Grade 3 and 6 testing, a focus on improving literacy and numeracy scores, increasing retention rates and improving educational outcomes while simultaneously focusing on improving internal capacity by creating the opportunities for teachers to learn individually and collectively and to share that learning to improve the system.

The teacher unions in Ontario have played a major role in improving the professional capacity of teachers.

They lobbied for the inclusion of the voices of teachers and the unions that represent them in educational decisions. Individually and collectively, they worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Education to deliver multiple learning opportunities for teachers, established learning communities of teachers across the province and influenced the roll out of many education initiatives. As a result of teacher and union

concern about the intensification of work, the marginalization of teacher professional judgement in curriculum and assessment, and the deterioration of teaching and learning conditions, unions used the collective bargaining process to examine teacher working conditions, and make recommendations for changes to the system.

The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario ETFO also reclaimed the space around teachers' use of professional judgement. In 2015, ETFO negotiated a new clause in its central agreement entitled Professional Judgement. Section C.2.5 reads:

Professional Judgement “shall be defined as judgement that is informed by professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, context, evidence of learning, methods of instruction and assessment, and the criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning.”

ETFO has produced a series of documents that help teachers articulate their professional judgement for the decisions they make. Ontario has been judged to be a high-performing system but what is evident in the policy decisions taken is that there has been an increased recognition of the importance of teachers and their unions in ensuring system improvement.

Introducing Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia

Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia is one of the components of Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education, 2015. The EECD has identified six Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia. These Standards are:

1. Teachers know, and respond to, and engage all students.
2. Teachers know their subjects and how to teach them.
3. Teachers use “Assessment for and of Learning, “to guide teaching and learning.
4. Teachers create safe and positive learning environments
5. Teachers participate in professional learning throughout their careers.
6. Teachers model and promote professionalism in teaching.

These standards do not seem very different from many standards across Canada and the world.

So what is the purpose of introducing Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia? How will the Teaching Standards “promote the teaching profession and heighten awareness of the vital role that teachers play in the development and learning of our children and youth?” The Action Plan states, “this will require support for teachers and administrators... Teachers need support, time and structure that will allow them to focus on student learning and student achievement.” But nowhere in the page that follows is there any initiative that focuses on improving the learning and teaching conditions in schools. Verger (2015) speaks to this paradox: “Teachers are supposed to do more than before, do it differently and better than before even though their working conditions are poorer and their preparation to take on these increasingly complex situations is not supported.” (p.3)

In the Action Plan it is evident that Teaching Standards is the vehicle to introduce a common teacher appraisal system. It is not evident how the Standards provide the framework for teachers to develop an individual and collective internal accountability system that has as its ultimate goal the success of every student. Although there are references to “Establishing a Centre for Excellence, a Minister's Forum for Teaching Excellence, allocation of professional development funding” (p.17) and provide teachers and school administrators with ongoing professional development in the use of assessment for student programming and intervention, (p.19), these initiatives are not yet in play and it is unclear as to how these initiatives will ultimately result in changing teacher practice.

So what is perceived first and foremost as the rationale for adopting teaching standards? Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia are linked to an accountability agenda which focuses on better student performance in math, literacy and career readiness and teacher performance appraisal. The NSTU believes that the prime reason for the introduction of the Standards is the response to critiques of the present education system, the performance of Nova Scotia students on international tests, and as part of the Minister's Action Plan. What teachers will see and experience first is another management system, another external initiative that is about control and not support.

One must caution the EECD that the alignment of standards to teacher performance does not address the issue of internal accountability. It is a single – pronged approach that has limited potential to change educational outcomes. Indeed, most high – performing jurisdictions have adopted a broader approach – a dual focus on external accountability measures and the development of teacher professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger (2014) propose that jurisdictions embrace an expanded accountability agenda that encompasses meaningful teacher learning, resource accountability, and professional capacity.

Will the EECD embrace the larger accountability agenda of Darling – Hammond? Will the research lessons learned as documented by Fullan and Hargreaves (2011, 2015) become the driving force to change the education system in Nova Scotia? Where will the NSTU be reassured as to the provision of adequate resources and supportive learning conditions to support teachers in their daily tasks? When will we address creating teaching and learning conditions in the schools of Nova Scotia where teachers and administrators can work in conditions conducive to teacher learning, sharing and collaboration? Where is it indicated that the EECD will assume the responsibility of ensuring that initiatives are adequately funded and evaluated to determine impact on learning and teaching?

“The past 25 years have shown that incremental reforms with too little attention to prioritization and integration are not resulting in the depth of change our school system needs. To effect fundamental shifts in the system, we need a holistic approach that rallies the public sector and all education partners around the goal of aligning resources to the needs of schools”.

In the Minister's Action Plan – “Coming in September 2015, (p.10) there are a series of macro and micro initiatives, that do not seem aligned to be implemented in a cohesive and orderly fashion. For example, the Minister has indicated that the EECD will *establish a Ministers Forum for Teaching Excellence to provide teachers with support, opportunities for networking, and teacher requested professional development.* (p.11) The NSTU, to date, has not received notification that this forum exists.

Although the Minister and the EECD may intend to use educational research to guide the educational agenda being proposed, this premise is not evident in the documents received to date and distributed to teachers. In our opinion, it was pre-emptive of the EECD to establish Teaching Standards without having established the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence, disseminated its purpose and mandate, engaged all educational partners in prioritizing system needs, outlined its plan for supporting teachers in their development and established its credibility as a positive force to change the teaching and learning culture in Nova Scotia. It is also not clear how this Centre will work with the EECD on curriculum development and implementation.

There is also no indication in the Minister's Action Plan as to how resources will be allocated to support the ambitious plan to “Renew; Rebuild, Refocus”.

Although the Minister has identified many initiatives in her Action Plan that mirror best practice in other jurisdictions to improve educational outcomes, the fragmented and hasty implementation of many of these initiatives and a seemingly lack of alignment of the initiatives risks the success of her larger plan.

This caution to proceed slowly and with mindfulness is stated in the Report from the Minister's Panel,

With other jurisdictions around the world, Nova Scotia shares in the challenge of modernizing a school system that was created for the realities of the 20th century. Many of the changes introduced since the 1990s were intended to create an environment for 21st century teaching and learning.

We've heard that many of these reforms have not been adopted effectively or implementation has often proceeded without an appreciation for the day-to-day realities of schools (e.g., too many initiatives). We have also heard the importance of an integrated approach to change, ensuring that changes to one area of the system do not have unintended consequences in other areas of the system."

The NSTU asks the Minister and the EECD to slow down the speed of implementation of these initiatives. It is important that all partners understand the sequence of initiatives and that the initiatives contribute to improving teacher practice.

The Standards:

Although the Minister has indicated that this is a discussion year for the Standards, there is a lot of ambiguity as to what that exactly means. Has the EECD devised a mechanism to seek input from the professionals to change the Standards, to modify or revise them? It has come to the attention of the NSTU that many Boards were uncertain as to the process the EECD was using to garner feedback on the Standards. We have recently been notified by the EECD that such a process of data collection will occur but have received no indication as to the mechanism that will be used and how it will be communicated to Boards and to teachers. In Saskatchewan, the regulatory Board has asked teachers to develop the exemplars for each standard, that inclusive process is more respectful of teacher input than the one which has been used to introduce standards in Nova Scotia.

Local leaders and individual members informed the NSTU that the presentation of the standards varied across the province. In spite of the EECD's assuring us that a plan for the presentation did exist, sharing the documents with the NSTU, providing in-services and documentation for Boards, it has become increasingly clear that the Standards were presented or distributed as an afterthought, an addition to an already crowded agenda on the opening days of schools. Therefore, for many teachers, they have assumed little or no meaning. Teaching Standards, when well-implemented, can become the basis for creating a shared vision of excellence in education. Discussions about the purpose of public education, the role of teachers and administrators in the conceptualization and implementation of this vision are essential. If the professionals are not engaged, the adoption of Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia becomes just another failed educational opportunity or remains an educational policy in name only.

The EECD acknowledges "Consistency and universal application are essential to the successful introduction of teaching standards..."

Yet, there has been a lack of consistency in the manner in which Standards were presented. It is still unclear how many teachers have engaged in discussions about the Standards. It is a well-documented fact that the lack of standardization in an implementation process is one of the major reasons implementation initiatives do not meet their intended goals.

The NSTU is also seeking clarification on the descriptors of these Standards. Will these descriptors become the basis for the indicators of performance? How will the indicators of performance be developed and how will the NSTU, as the official voice of the teaching profession, be involved? Will there be differing levels of performance based on career stages as is the case in Australia? If Teaching Standards are to be used for performance appraisal in 2017-2018, it is essential that the discussions on the indicators of performance begin immediately.

The EECD is also engaged in a process to revise teacher education at the pre-service level. How are the Teaching Standards during a discussion year, being used to drive the revision of teacher education? What is the relationship, if any, between the descriptors for Teaching Standards being developed by the faculties of education and the descriptors needed for the performance management system for teachers?

These questions need to be answered in order to ensure that the EECD has a comprehensive plan that truly links the 4 pillars for student success: modern education system, innovative curriculum, excellence in teaching and leadership, and inclusive school environments.

Examining the Standards

1. Teachers know, and respond to, and engage all students.

In the descriptor that accompanies Standard #1, there is a list of the qualities and behaviours of a teacher who exemplifies the Standards of Practice. The beginning sentence explains the engagement of the professional in the successful learning of the student. Other phrases outline the skill sets and knowledge required including: knowledge of students and student learning theory, and stages of student development.

Teachers are responsible to use information (it is unclear what is meant by information in this context) about student development and diverse cultures, learning strengths and needs, Languages and life experiences, to guide all aspects of teaching. This sentence is highly problematic in nature if this becomes an indicator of performance. It is right and just that all teachers have knowledge of student development. That is an essential part of their knowledge base taught in B.Ed. programming. What causes the NSTU concern is twofold: the linking of student development and diverse cultures. This sentence as written is mixing theoretical knowledge to an understanding of diverse cultures that at present is minimally, if at all, taught in B.Ed. programs. Understanding of diverse cultures is an experiential learning journey that many teachers have embraced as part of their own personal development but that requires a personal and financial commitment to seek out knowledge about another culture that can only occur with prolonged contact and much self – reflection on issues of bias, stereotypes, racial profiling and white privilege. To suggest that teachers must possess a knowledge of diverse cultures and languages is setting teachers up for failure. What teachers must be able to do is understand and acknowledge the role that race and culture play in learning, acknowledge the impact socio-economics plays in education attainment and success, and be able to identify systemic discrimination in education specifically for our Aboriginal, African Nova Scotian and minority communities and work towards eliminating it in their classrooms to create inclusive learning spaces.

They provide culturally responsive, engaging learning experiences that enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. It is incumbent upon the EECD to define culturally responsive pedagogy and to provide opportunities for teachers to understand what culturally responsive pedagogy looks like in a classroom. Before inserting this as a descriptor of the broader requirement *that teachers respond to and engage all learners*, there needs to be a comprehensive plan from the province for professional learning and a recognition that this particular descriptor cannot be quickly or easily implemented nor judged. The EECD should also embed these experiences in their curriculum to bring about effective change. Teaching about cultural responsiveness in isolation does not bring about the change in teacher and students attitudes and a move to ensure that our classrooms and schools are inclusive.

2. Teachers know their subjects and how to teach them.

This Standard is one that most teaching professionals agree lies at the core of their profession – subject knowledge and appropriate pedagogy. However the descriptors attached to this Standard are very open to interpretation. What is meant by “Teachers gather input from parents and guardians, families and/or communities to create meaningful learning opportunities? To what extent are teachers obliged to

gather input from parents? What type of input are we talking about? What is the role of community in creating meaningful learning experiences when the curriculum, as determined by the province, must be implemented and all the learning outcomes met? Is the focus here on accessing community resources to augment the learning opportunities for students such as the inclusion of swimming sessions at the community pool or is it broader than that?

The emphasis on using classroom experience and professional learning to continuously inform and update practice is a given. However an additional component has been added and that is the reliance on educational research. There is no denying that research on learning needs to inform practice but what access to educational research exists for most NS teachers?

Does the EECD provide teachers, through their Boards, with access to educational research databases such as EBSCO and ProQuest? Does the EECD circulate the research conducted by Nova Scotia educational researchers to teachers via electronic format? Has the EECD commissioned educational research that could benefit teachers? Many of the high – performing jurisdictions have institutionalized education research within public education. Ontario set up the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research (KNAER) which provided research funding for collaborative projects between Boards and universities. Establishing networks of education research development and dissemination is a precursor for requiring teachers to inform educational practice using research. Before inserting educational research as a descriptor to support pedagogical knowledge there has to be a recognition that access to educational research is provided. The improvement of pedagogical practice is not tied to the implementation of external standards but is part of a growth model of professional accountability and development.

Teachers are knowledgeable about and utilize provincial curricula, initiatives.

The word initiatives is again open to interpretation. There are many education initiatives at the Board and provincial level. Is it the requirement that teachers be knowledgeable about all initiatives or just specific initiatives? How are these initiatives communicated? Whose responsibility is it to communicate these initiatives? How do Board and provincial initiatives intersect? Should the EECD ensure that provincial initiatives take priority and that Board initiatives be limited so as not to overwhelm teachers with too many initiatives? The Teacher Workload Study, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Ontario identified the competing initiatives of Board and Ministry as one of the factors that impacted on teacher morale and workload.

3. Teachers use “Assessment for and of Learning, “to guide teaching and learning.

The NSTU recognizes that teachers are responsible for assessing student learning, and to monitor student progress. Again, in this section the reference is made to culturally responsive assessment practices. How does the EECD define culturally-responsive assessment practices? What does culturally-responsive assessment look like? Has the EECD assumed a role in providing professional learning opportunities on culturally – responsive assessment practice to teachers and administrators? Of increasing concern to Nova Scotia educators is the excessive amount of data that needs to be collected, analyzed and entered for each student. Does the expectation of culturally responsive assessment practices exist at both the classroom and provincial level?

4. Teachers create safe and positive learning environments.

The NSTU is concerned about the well-being of teachers and students and has long been an advocate for safe and positive learning environments. The Standard in itself is not problematic. However, in the descriptor paragraph there is an assumption that teachers have access to mental health professionals and other resources to help students in difficulty. There is also an expectation that teachers will be able to find innovative and progressive ways to address “behavioural challenges, and mental health concerns”.

That is a very broad expectation. What the NSTU finds disconcerting is that the role of the EECD is non-existent in this document. Establishing Standards without developing capacity is short-sighted and has not provided the results in most jurisdictions that policy makers have hoped to achieve. Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, and Pittenger (2014) propose a three-legged framework for strengthening accountability: meaningful learning, resource accountability, and professional capacity. (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2015, p.3). In this one-page Teaching Standards document, the absence of any statement of shared responsibility for the EECD to provide this three legged approach is troubling. If the EECD has the intention to learn from educational research, it is incumbent upon the EECD to slow down the implementation of Teaching Standards so as to ensure that all components necessary to support a renewed and collaborative vision of educational success are in place and coordinated in such a way as to ensure scaffolding and success.

5. Teachers participate in professional learning throughout their careers.

Research has shown that professional learning is essential to improve educational outcomes. Professional learning must become a priority for the EECD and its education partners. There needs to be a commitment to resource, prioritize, and monitor professional learning. The responsibility for professional learning is a shared one as Boards and the EECD must find time for teachers to share and collaborate. The designs for professional learning need to be examined and a variety of learning opportunities must exist. These learning designs need to be job-embedded, respect change theory and engage teachers and administrators in an exploration of the changes needed to happen so as to positively impact practice. There also needs to be some autonomy for the professional to identify personal learning goals and to access funding to further these goals.

In this descriptor, it is stated” They identify and address their professional learning needs through self-reflection and collaboration.” What is the intent of this statement? The self-reflection occurs as part of the Teachers Annual Learning Plan but the collaboration piece needs to be defined more comprehensively.

It is unclear how the Centre for Excellence will support teachers in their professional learning and provide leadership.

Although The NSTU may support many of these Teaching Standards conceptually, the concrete nature of how these standards will be used to support the development of professional capital is missing. In short, what is the plan, including the detailed critical path including timelines, and resources, to create the learning and teaching conditions where both individual and collective learning can occur and where teachers can adopt, adapt and create best practices to improve student learning in Nova Scotia?

6. Teachers model and promote professionalism in teaching.

There are many ongoing debates as to the nature of professionalism and the concept is subject to interpretation. Teachers take their professionalism very seriously. They find it very disheartening to be criticized by politicians and undervalued in the media.

The NSTU seeks further clarification on the following statement. *They demonstrate professional conduct while completing a range of associated duties in a variety of settings, including schools, communities, digital sites and social media.*

The NSTU also questions the intent of “ Teachers demonstrate a commitment to the school community through participation in school activities.” This may be perceived as indicating an obligation for teachers to participate in extra-curricular activities. Many teachers engage in activities outside their classroom on an ongoing basis, year after year. That is a personal commitment that teachers make and should not be assumed as professional or contractual obligation.

Conclusion

The Minister's Action Plan sets out a bold agenda for improving educational success in Nova Scotia. *Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia* is one of the pillars of change. The Standards have the potential to serve as a means to generate fierce discussions among educators on teaching and learning in Nova Scotia schools, and act as a catalyst for teachers to identify and articulate their practice.

The manner in which these Standards are presented and implemented, the discourse that surrounds them and the performance system developed from the Standards requires great attention to detail. This is not a process to be rushed; it requires true consultation with the NSTU and its members, not lip service. It requires time and an examination of how the present teaching and learning conditions existing in our schools help or hinder how teachers can adopt the Standards and put them into practice to improve teaching and learning.

The NSTU echoes many of the statements in various reports such as the EECD Report and the Report from the Minister's Panel that advocate for collaborative processes and integrated systems thinking.

If the province is truly committed to raising the bar on student achievement, it will move quickly to identify champions of the action plan in a small designated team of leaders with vision, and will realign resources and staff to support implementation. The potential of the government's plan to have an impact on schools will depend in large part on the province taking steps to bring different minds together to design, drive, and regularly report on the impact of change.

Until very recently, this has not been the case with the NSTU. In spite of being the official voice of teachers as designated under the Education Act and having a dual mandate of collective bargaining and advancing the teaching profession, the NSTU has not been actively engaged in deliberations as to the scope and sequence of change. We have been pseudo-consulted; that is, we have been invited to consultations where the trajectory of initiatives has been pre-determined, where documents have been centrally developed with very little space for change. As a result of NSTU challenges to this marginalization of our expertise and commitment, the EECD has responded partially to this critique by inviting the NSTU to assume a more active role in the initial design of initiatives such as the B.Ed Committee and the work on leadership indicators. However, it is still very evident that the EECD has not adopted a consultative framework that actively involves major partners in the conceptualization, deliberation, and implementation of initiatives.

The change literature explores the causes for failure to implement change. One of the factors is: the failure of change agents to actively involve persons on whom the change acts directly in setting the goals and aims of the change initiatives. Another reason cited for failure is a lack of recognition of the importance of training and development needs. Change initiatives are not realized because realistic timelines are sacrificed in the desire to respond to political or fiscal timelines. Schools who must implement these major change initiatives are not given adequate time and resources. Fullan, (2001) speaks of "episodic events rather than processes".

The NSTU believes in the importance of a high-quality public education system for students and teachers, as we have stated on numerous occasions and in many responses to ministerial documents. Our mission is to unify and elevate the teaching profession and we direct our energy, and resources towards improving the quality of education in Nova Scotia. That has been our focus and our delivery for over a hundred years. We also believe, and this is corroborated by multiple researchers, that teachers should have direct input into the design and delivery of our education system. It is time to discard the mentality of *doing to teachers* but instead adopt a mentality of *doing with teachers and their unions* to enact change.

This means listening to the voices of teachers, through the NSTU, when we say, "This is too much; this initiative should be priority #1. There are too many initiatives that are not aligned or this has not been implemented as you planned. These Teaching Standards have not been presented in the way that you envisioned."

The order and timing of reform is critical. There are some foundations to the school system that need to be functioning well before other changes can be introduced successfully. We echo the words of The Minister's Panel Report,

As such, the province may wish to consider that some of the panel's recommendations will require a longer timeline for implementation. A holistic approach to change does not imply that the government overwhelms the system with change. Instead, we are suggesting an integrated action plan be designed around a cross government commitment to achieving an ambitious set of outcomes for children and youth and an explicit commitment to disrupting the status quo.

The EECD must also spend more time in determining how the pieces of the Action Plan fit and which pieces should be implemented first. The EECD must recognize the importance of resources in order to achieve the educational objectives outlined in the Minister's Action Plan and commit to providing them on a sustained basis. As is evidenced by the recent response of teachers to the collective bargaining process, Nova Scotia teachers are refusing to do more with less. They are overwhelmed and demoralized. They do not welcome multiple educational initiatives that seem peripheral to their work in the classroom.

The NSTU recognizes the need for accountability. O' Neill (2002) states "...if we want greater accountability without damaging professional performance we need intelligent accountability. Which requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control.". Accountability should not exist only at the level of classroom and school but at all levels of the education system. Reflective practice does not only apply to the classroom. The EECD must take a step back and reflect on the why, the how, and the when of introducing Teaching Standards in Nova Scotia.

Enacting Teaching Standards as a form of discipline or performance management will not lead teachers to engage in the critical discourse necessary to imagine and create a better education system for Nova Scotia.

The NSTU asks the Minister of Education and the EECD to rethink its plan for the introduction and implementation of Teaching Standards. If your purpose is, as the document suggests "Excellence in Teaching and Learning", then let us discuss what constitutes good teaching, how to promote it and how to support it.

That is the conversation we need to have – a growth model for teachers not a performance one.

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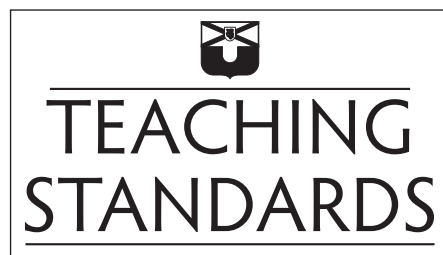
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