

Email Message to NSTU Members

Subject: COVID-19 Update: May 28, 2021

*The following message sent on behalf of NSTU president Paul Wozney
will be forwarded to all NSTU members with NSTU email accounts.*

Dear Colleagues:

The NSTU was surprised by Premier Rankin's announcement this afternoon that schools outside of HRM and Sydney, and all schools everywhere for specified students with special needs, will reopen on Wednesday June 2nd. The NSTU was not consulted on this decision and is still waiting on written documentation.

As I indicated in our media release attached, the NSTU is deeply concerned about what appears to be a significant change in government's position. I am concerned that while our covid cases are slowing down, our population is nowhere near 75% vaccinated as Public Health indicated would be the threshold for reopening. The majority of our students do not have access to a vaccine and community spread continues in our province.

I know that you are hanging on by your fingernails and that for many, this has been the most difficult year of your career. The news that you must shift again is extremely challenging to you as professionals and as parents. I know you worry about your safety, the safety of your own family and that of your students. We have 4 weeks of school remaining and please know that I support you and understand how much stress this puts on you.

Occupational Health and Safety Right to Refuse Dangerous Work

Every employee in Nova Scotia has the right to refuse unsafe work. Attached find a one-page document that describes this process step-by-step. Essentially, you would need to identify in writing why in your circumstances you believe your work is unsafe. If your Principal does not remedy your concerns, your school's JOHS committee will analyze whether your refusal is reasonable. Then, if required the NS Department of Labour will investigate your complaint and determine whether your refusal is reasonable. During the process, you can be reassigned to work other than the specific work you are complaining of.

Stress and Sick Leave

If your health is suffering and you are not coping, you are entitled to use your sick leave. Also, please visit <http://nstuinsurance.ca> and/or call the Member Assistance Program 1-800-565-6788 for information about available benefits for all your eligible benefits.

Childcare Issues

EECD has acknowledged that some teachers will have childcare challenges because of this announcement and that such concerns will be handled by your Regional Centre. If childcare issues are presenting a hurdle that you can't address with other options (like family support or hiring a caregiver during a pandemic on short notice) these concerns should be directed to your Principal. If the Centre is unwilling or unable to accommodate you, please contact your Staff Officer (contact information below) to discuss whether a Human Rights Act complaint would be appropriate.

Your NSTU staff is available to support you. Please do not hesitate to reach out.

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HRCE
SRCE
SSRCE, TRCE and HRCE
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All my best
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President, Nova Scotia Teachers Union