

news



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N O V A S C O T I A T E A C H E R S U N I O N

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Action required to address ongoing substitute teacher shortage

(Halifax, NS) NSTU President Paul Wozney says a substitute shortage is making it more difficult for teachers to meet the diverse needs of students. The NSTU is calling on Government to increase compensation for substitute teachers to help improve recruitment and retention.

“The Omicron wave has placed tremendous strain on our education system to the point where basic supervision has become the sole focus in many schools, and this has come at the expense of providing engaging and dynamic learning experiences for students,” says Wozney. “Teachers are being pulled from one classroom to the next filling in for sick and isolating colleagues and, as a result, they haven’t been allocated the prep time necessary to adequately plan and prepare to meet the individual needs of their students.”

Recently, the NSTU distributed a tracking form to members to record lost preparation time. Under the current collective agreement, 12.5% of a teacher’s time is required to be designated for marking and preparation.

According to recent media reports, approximately 12% of teachers have been off sick at any given time during the peak of the Omicron wave - this represents nearly 1000 teachers. Recently, the NSTU and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development reached an agreement for allowing education students completing their practicums to substitute as a temporary action. Government and the education entities have also modified guidelines, in recent years, to allow for unqualified individuals to work as substitute teachers. Even with these measures, shortages persist.

“This is not a new problem, the substitute shortage was causing significant disruption prior to 2020 and the arrival of COVID, but Omicron has really pushed the system to its breaking point,” says Wozney. “Unless we are able to increase our pool of substitutes and ensure that teachers have adequate time to prepare for teaching students, the quality of education students receive will begin to erode.”

Qualified substitute teachers in Nova Scotia earn some of the lowest daily wages in Canada relative to their peers.

“As we enter the era of “living with COVID” we should anticipate that future waves could have a significant impact on public schools moving forward,” says Wozney. “Steps need to be taken now to increase recruitment to help fortify and protect the system against an uncertain future. This can’t be done unless we pay our substitute teachers fairly.”

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