

The Story of Our Professional Associations

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Those I've had the pleasure of working with in this role have likely heard me joke about writing a book called *The ABCs of the NSTU*, a tribute to the many acronyms we use every day. Well, the time has come. Consider this the first "chapter."

What better place to begin than with the 21 acronyms closely tied to one of the most anticipated days of the year—the fourth Friday in October—our Professional Associations (PA) Conference Day.

What is "October Conference"?

October 2026 will mark the 42nd year of this annual event, where more than 21+ conferences take place simultaneously across the province. Wondering about the "plus"? Read on.

Who are the Professional Associations?

They are dedicated teams of full-time educators who volunteer their time throughout the year to plan meaningful professional learning opportunities. From organizing themes and securing presenters to booking venues and coordinating logistics, these member-volunteers design conferences grounded in the needs and interests of their colleagues. Teacher-led professional learning is truly a labour of care, commitment, and expertise, and it deserves recognition.

Why are Professional Associations so important?

As you explore the 2026 conference offerings, or navigate registration, wait for responses, or arrive on conference day, take a moment to reflect on the work behind the scenes. The organizers are full-time teachers and specialists who are balancing many responsibilities while striving to support their peers. Their efforts ensure these conferences remain valuable, relevant, and accessible.

PA Conferences also give teachers choice. These learning opportunities are created and planned **for teachers and specialists by teachers and specialists** who have shared experiences and understand your classroom realities and professional needs. Since 2024, PA Conference Day has been formally recognized as a Professional Learning Day within the Teachers' Provincial Agreement. Having this day preserved in our collective agreement is a significant acknowledgment of teacher-directed learning and professional autonomy. As an NSTU member you have choice in the professional learning offered through our PA Conferences.

How do you choose a conference?

Each year, details about conference themes, locations, and offerings are published in *The Teacher* and on the NSTU website ahead of

registration. Every Professional Association designs its conference differently, based on available presenters, venues, and format options.

Interested in getting involved?

Consider attending a conference's Annual General Meeting, where you can learn about executive roles and volunteer opportunities. Many PAs also share these opportunities on their websites and social media. Member-volunteers are the heart of the NSTU, and your time and expertise can make a meaningful difference.

Where are conferences held?

Locations vary depending on factors like venue availability and where organizing teams are based. To improve access, and increase capacity many PAs now offer hybrid or virtual options, as well as "satellite" sites.

A satellite site is a concurrent conference that is happening at another location in the province. Several associations, including AEA (l'Association des Enseignants Acadiens), AST (The Association of Science Teachers), ATA (the Art Teachers Association), CTEANS (Career and Technology Educators Association of NS), NSTALL



(The Nova Scotia Teachers Association of Literacy and Learning), and SSTA (The Social Studies Teachers Association) have all hosted satellite sites over the years. These are now highlighted on the annual conference poster sent to schools each fall and posted in your staff room. Some associations also offer fully virtual or hybrid models, depending on volunteer capacity. For instance, our newest PA, NSATEE (Nova Scotia Association of Teachers for Equity in Education) pivoted to a fully virtual conference in 2025 while FSTA (the Family Studies Teachers' Association) offered a hybrid/virtual option for their conference. If you have experience in these areas, consider reaching out to a PA to support their efforts. Many of our Professional Associations host their conferences at the same venue from year-to-year because of the relationships they have established.

When do you register?

Beginning in September 2026, online registration will align with teachers' payday. Registration opens **Thursday, September 17 at 7:00 a.m. for NSTU members only for the first 10 days.** Be sure your NSTU login credentials are up to date in advance to secure your spot early. To do so, you will need to know your **NSTU username and password. Please contact webaccounts@nstu.ca and ensure your credentials are in place before this date.** This decision was made to ensure that seats are preserved for NSTU members first. This is an important priority so make sure you register early to secure your seat.

Learning Beyond October

Professional learning doesn't stop with October Conference Day. Many PAs offer additional opportunities throughout the year. For example, the Educational Drama Association of Nova Scotia (EDANS) hosts a spring conference during DramaFest, providing learning sessions for drama educators while students participate in workshops. Keep an eye on PA websites and social media for ongoing opportunities to learn, and to get involved.

Which conference will you choose?

With 21 Professional Associations offering diverse and engaging options, there is something for everyone. Whether your interests lie in early learning, literacy, the arts, sciences, counselling, physical education, or beyond, these conferences are made possible by passionate, knowledgeable member-volunteers.

All PAs, including ATEC (The Association of Teachers of Every Child), ATENS (the Association of Teachers of English of NS), ATYA (The Association of Teachers of Young Adolescents), BETA (Business Education Teachers Association), MTA (Math Teachers Association), NSLTA (Nova Scotia Language Teachers Association), NSMEA (Nova Scotia Music Educators Association), NSSCA (Nova Scotia School Counsellors Association), PETA (Primary Elementary Teachers Association), PISA (Psychologists in Schools Association), SPAA (Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists Association) and TAPHE (Teachers Association for Physical and Health Education) don't exist without our dedicated, subject-matter enthusiast member-volunteers! With all these options, we are confident you will find a learning opportunity that meets their needs.

The choice is yours—and the opportunities are endless.