



# Teacher Certification: The Foundation of Our Professional Status

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Teaching is often described as a calling—but it is also a profession. This distinction did not happen overnight or by accident. It was built, intentionally, through decades of advocacy, higher standards, and collective action.

Teacher certification is at the centre of that story.

There was a time when teachers, mostly men, entered the classroom as a temporary steppingstone on their way to their “real jobs.” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, school systems expanded rapidly as schooling became more of an expectation of all children and the public school system started to take more shape across the country. Governments needed many more teachers at low cost. They recruited women because they believed women were more likely to commit to teaching long-term, work for significantly less pay, and had nurturing qualities very suited for working with children. This is known as the feminization of the teaching profession.

As more women entered the field, teaching increasingly came to be viewed as an extension of women’s caregiving roles rather than a highly skilled profession. Over the last century, teachers and their unions pushed for higher standards to obtain professional status. Over the 50 years, things changed more rapidly. Parallel to other professions, entry into the teaching profession moved into universities requiring extensive postsecondary education. An undergraduate degree became a prerequisite. A Bachelor of Education followed, grounded in research, pedagogy, and supervised practicum experience. Teaching became governed by provincial regulation, professional standards, and a code of ethics.

These changes were not arbitrary. The creation of the teacher certification structure and the regulating of the profession were deliberate efforts—supported and advanced by teachers and their union in collaboration with Government.

The certification structure was designed to not only recognize entry into the profession but also recognize teachers as lifelong learners. The Continuing Service Education framework within the teacher certification structure established pathways to higher classification levels, recognizing growth and sustainment of a highly qualified teaching force. These efforts established teaching as a profession requiring both subject-matter expertise and specialized pedagogical knowledge, and reflect a belief that students deserve teachers who are deeply prepared—intellectually, professionally, and ethically.

The certification structure is sometimes misunderstood as

bureaucratic or procedural. In reality, it protects three things: students, teachers, and the profession itself.

First, it protects students by ensuring their teachers have both content knowledge and training in how students learn. Endorsement requirements recognize that teachers should be prepared in the subject areas they teach. This is not about restriction; it is about preparation and support.

Second, certification protects teachers. Salary classifications are tied directly to certification levels. Continuing Service Education pathways—whether through approved degree programs, certificate programs, integrated programs, or the Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Program—recognize the importance of lifelong learning and reward professional growth.

Third, certification protects professional autonomy. When entry standards are rigorous and transparent, teachers are recognized as experts and co-creators of the education system. Higher standards strengthen our collective ability to advocate for curriculum integrity, appropriate assignments, and educational decision-making grounded in pedagogy rather than expediency.

One of the guiding principles of Nova Scotia’s certification framework is that changes must be based on educational concerns—not teacher supply or labour mobility. That principle is foundational. It affirms that professional standards are not bargaining chips; they are safeguards.

Across Canada, education systems are experiencing staffing pressures. Nova Scotia is no exception. Labour mobility agreements recognize certifications from other Canadian jurisdictions. Conditional certificates may be issued in certain circumstances. Article 17 of the Teachers’ Provincial Agreement allows for temporary permits to teach when no certified teacher can be secured for a position.

These measures exist to address immediate needs. They are, by design, temporary solutions.

History reminds us why this distinction matters. The professionalization of teaching was achieved by raising standards, not lowering them. While flexibility may be necessary in moments of shortage, long-term solutions must continue to be rooted in educational integrity. Students deserve fully prepared teachers. Teachers deserve the professional recognition that comes with clearly defined and consistently applied standards.

Nova Scotia’s teacher certification system was not imposed upon

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the profession; it was co-authored with the profession. Through the Teachers' Provincial Agreement, regulatory frameworks, advisory councils, and ongoing consultation, teachers have had a voice in shaping the standards that define their work.

Certification is more than a set of requirements. It represents our commitment to preparation, ethical practice, subject expertise, and continuous improvement. It signals to the public that teaching is complex, knowledge-based work, deserving of respect and professional trust.

At a time when education systems face pressure to respond quickly to immediate challenges, it is worth remembering what it took to build the profession as we know it today. Certification is not red tape. It is professional protection. It exists because teachers insisted that their work required preparation, accountability, and recognition.

If we begin to view certification as optional or inconvenient, we risk eroding the very foundation that gives our work legitimacy and influence. That foundation remains essential — for our students, for our colleagues, and for the future of public education in Nova Scotia.