

Marking and Preparation Time Study

An examination of the marking and preparation time available to teachers in the public school system in Nova Scotia.



Prepared by:
Nova Scotia Teachers' Union
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Overview

Prior to 1994, marking and preparation time for teachers in Nova Scotia was negotiated between the district school boards and the teachers employed with that board. Across the province there existed a considerable range of time available to teachers. There was also a great deal of variation among teachers within a board, with elementary teachers typically receiving less guaranteed time for marking and preparation than their high school counterparts.

During the 1994 provincial negotiations, the government, primarily to address its fiscal agenda, determined that significant savings could be achieved by reducing the amount of marking and preparation time, thereby employing fewer teachers. They also sought a rationalization of time across the province. While the Union opposed this approach, government indicated its intention to use its legislative authority to achieve this and other demands. The result was a clause in the Teachers' Provincial Agreement that left the provision of marking and preparation time in district, and subsequently in regional, contracts, but that stipulated a uniformity among those clauses relating to marking and preparation. That provision of the TPA went further by insisting the primary clause in the district (regional) agreements would be:

The Board may schedule such activities in the school day as it considers appropriate for each teacher, provided the time allotted for preparation and marking on schedules determined by the Board shall include no less than an average over a reasonable time cycle of ten percent (10%) for such activities, the remaining ninety percent (90%) being for instruction or related assignments.

Subsequent grievance and arbitration decisions clarified that the ten percent of instructional time allocated for marking and preparation is an average among all teachers and the reasonable time cycle may be the full school year. As a consequence, individual teachers may receive more or less than the 10% of the instructional day for marking and preparation and this time is not required to be balanced between semesters.

The average also includes teachers with administrative responsibilities and guidance personnel. These teachers typically have less structured time schedules and often have little or no marking and lesson preparation to do.

The Union has consistently maintained its belief that teachers require adequate time to reflect on their professional practice, develop new and innovative teaching and learning strategies, explore new curricula, engage in dialogue with colleagues along with the more basic, although no less necessary or demanding, tasks of preparing for the details of each class and assessing student work to provide effective feedback for meaningful learning. Ten percent of the instructional day is not adequate. Nor is the current distribution of marking and preparation time equitable, effective or reasonable.

At the Union's annual policy making convention in May 2004, Council passed the following resolution, Resolution 2004-18.

Be It Resolved That the NSTU conduct a survey through school representatives whereby data is collected on actual marking and preparation time given to classroom teachers.

This study is in response to this decision by Council.

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed to determine how marking and preparation time was distributed among teachers. A copy of that questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

From the membership database, a partially random sample of 1500 teachers was drawn. A completely random sample would not have ensured data collection from a full sample of schools since large high schools would be represented disproportionately more than small elementary schools. Thus the sample first selected schools and then randomly selected teachers from that school in proportion to the school population. This guaranteed representation from a broad cross-section of schools while preserving the random nature of the survey.

A package was prepared for each teacher selected for the survey. The package included the survey, a memo outlining the reason for the survey, the Council resolution, the basis on which they had been chosen and the importance of the study. A postage paid, addressed envelope was provided in the package for the selected teacher to return his or her completed survey form.

Data Analysis

Of the 1500 surveys distributed, 152 were returned because the teacher was no longer available at the school. Some of these teachers had retired while others had moved to different schools. Therefore the effective initial sample size was 1348. A total of 719 surveys were returned or a response rate of 53.3%. Of those 719, 145 were completed by teachers whose responsibilities consisted of more than 50% guidance or by teachers with administrative responsibilities in excess of 50%. Teachers with 50% to 100% of their time spent in the classroom completed a total of 574 or 42.6% of the full sample and 79.8% of the returned surveys.

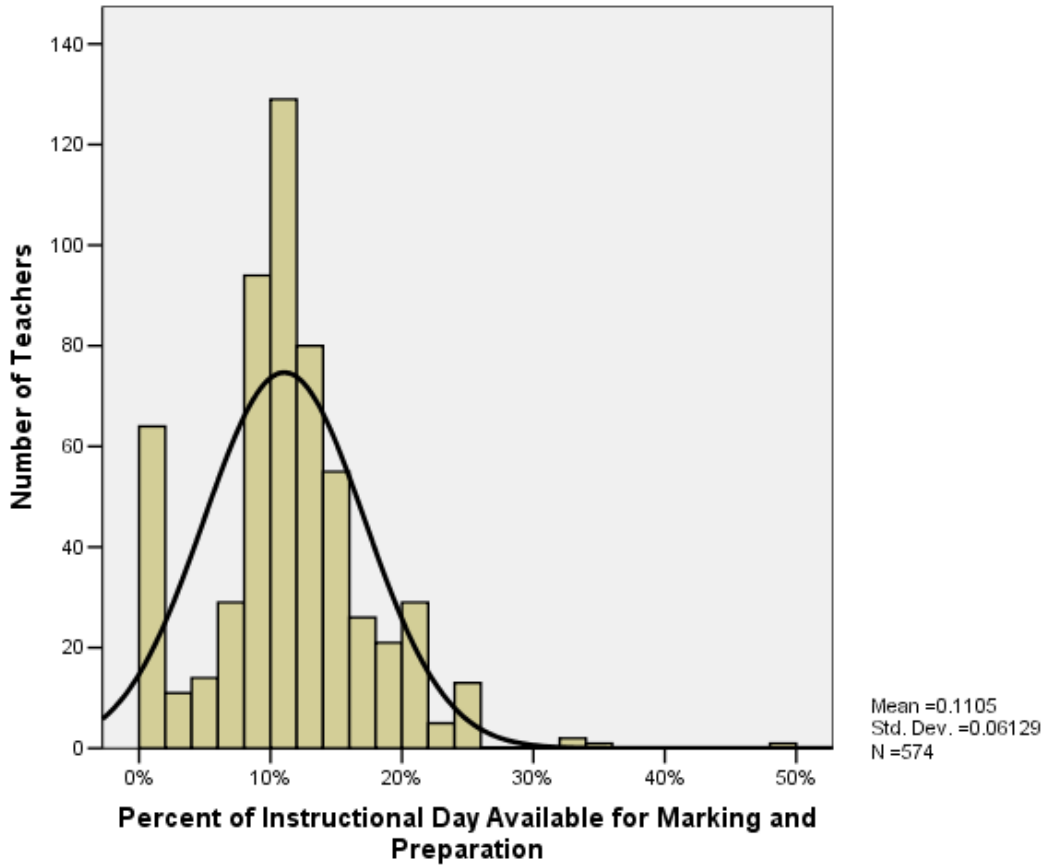
Of the 574 surveys, teachers in semestered schools submitted 149 surveys.

Survey respondents reported the length of the instructional day, the number of days in the scheduling cycle and the number of minutes of scheduled marking and preparation time they had in that schedule. The average percent marking and preparation time scheduled for the teacher was calculated by dividing the number of minutes of marking and preparation time by the product of the length of the instructional day by the number of days in the timetable cycle.

Aggregate numbers:

The analysis was restricted to data submitted by classroom teachers. While administrators, guidance and resource personnel require preparation and other professional time, the nature of their responsibilities is such that scheduled time is often not applicable.

The distribution of marking and preparation time for teachers illustrates the availability of time for most teachers centred around the mean. The anomaly at the high tail of the graph reflects the circumstance of one respondent.



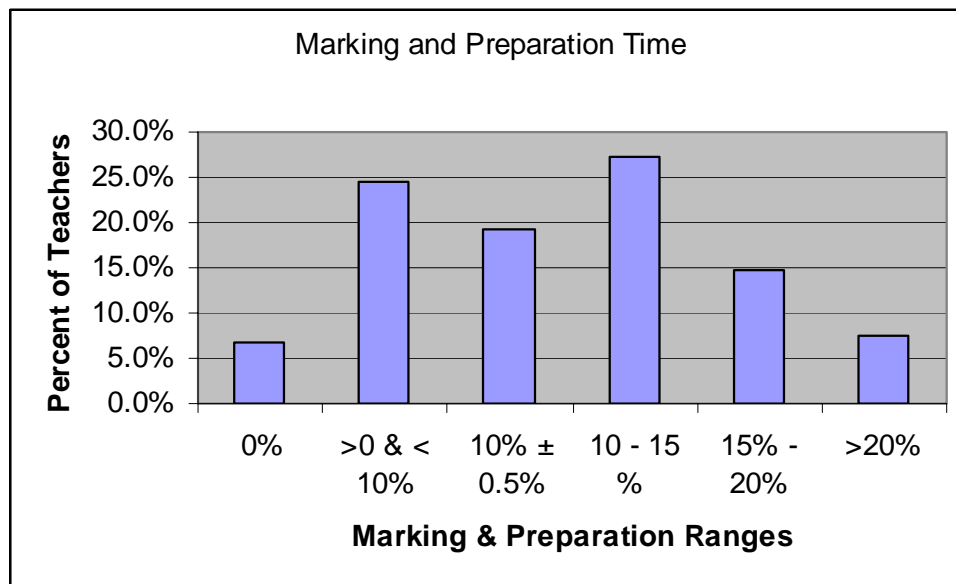
Overall, classroom teachers have an average of 11.1% marking and preparation time. This does not translate into a specific number of minutes because the length of the instructional day is not uniform among schools.¹ Aggregating these numbers into six categories we see:

Percent scheduled Marking and Preparation time	Percent of Teachers
0%	6.8%
>0 & < 10%	24.6%
10% ± 0.5%	19.2%
10 - 15 %	27.4%
15% - 20%	14.6%
>20%	7.5%

¹ Regulations mandate the instructional day for students at 300 to 360 minutes. The instructional day does not include time during which students are unavailable for instructions, such as recess or lunch periods.

Although the provincial average exceeds the requirements stipulated in the Teachers Provincial Agreement, 6.8% of the classroom teachers in Nova Scotia have no marking and preparation time. This translates into approximately 650 teachers. An additional 24.6%, or almost 2,400, have less than 10%² of their schedules for the work required to support student learning, yielding a total of 31.4% with less than 10%. From the frequency distribution chart above, it is clear these teachers are predominantly clustered between zero and 2% of the instructional day allocated to marking and preparation. 19.2% of teachers have approximately 10% marking and preparation time.³

We also see that 27.4% of teachers have between 10% and 15% marking and preparation time, 14.6% have between 15 and 20% and 7.5% have more than 20% of the instructional day available to them for support activities.



Teachers were also asked if they felt they had adequate time scheduled for marking and preparation. Of the 574 respondents, 270, or 47% indicated that the available time was not adequate. Teachers who stated there was inadequate time for marking and preparation were asked what how many minutes they believed would represent adequate marking and preparation time. When those answers were adjusted to reflect the average instructional cycle, teachers felt there should be approximately 16% marking and preparation time.

Elementary School:

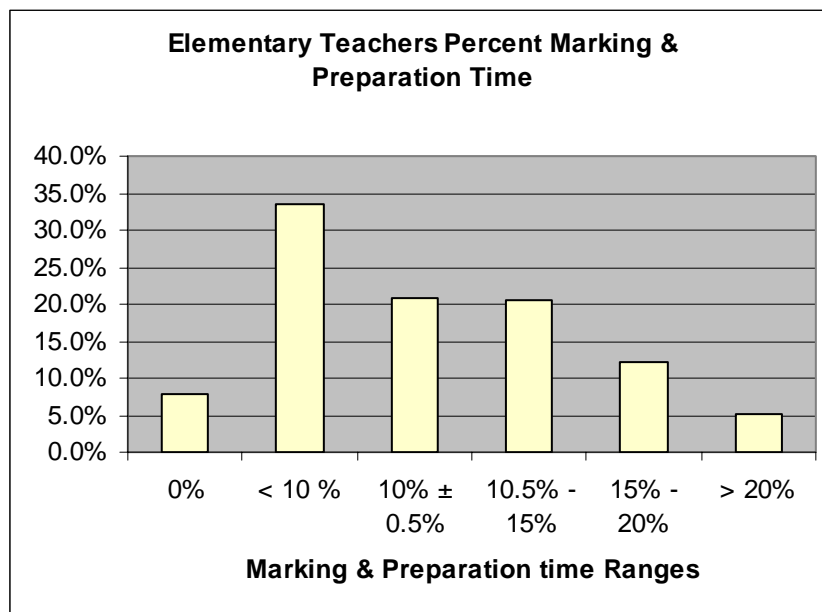
The picture changes notably when elementary school teachers are separated from the aggregate. 7.9% of them have no marking and preparation. 33.5% of elementary teachers, by far the largest group, have some marking and preparation time but have less than 10%. This means that 41.4%

² The figures for teachers having less than 10% marking and preparation time exclude those without any such time.

³ For the purpose of this analysis, teachers with between 9.5% and 10.5% scheduled marking and preparation time were classified as having 10% scheduled marking and preparation time.

with less than 10%. 20.9% of elementary teachers have 10% ± 0.5% marking and preparation time available. 20.5% of elementary teachers have between 10 and 15%, 12.2% have between 15 and 20%, and 5.1% have more than 20%.

Percent scheduled Marking and Preparation time – Elementary Teachers	Percent of Teachers
0%	7.9%
< 10 %	33.5%
10% ± 0.5%	20.9%
10.5% - 15%	20.5%
15% - 20%	12.2%
> 20%	5.1%

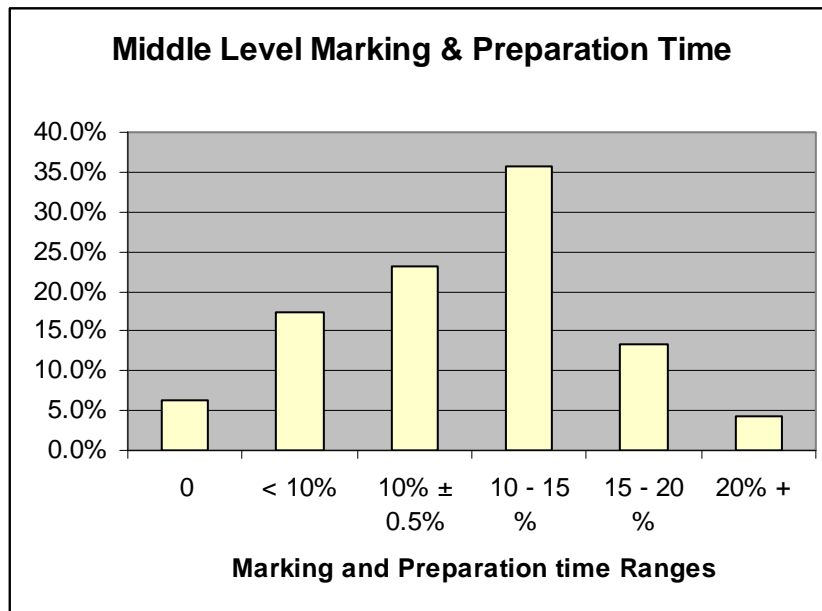


Middle Level

At the middle level, teachers have on average 11.1% of the instructional day for marking and preparation. This also conforms to the Teachers Provincial Agreement. However, we again note that a significant number of teachers, 6.3%, have no time allocated within the school day for the kinds of necessary learning support that students require. A further 17.5%, while having some time, have less than 10% for a total of 23.8% with less than 10% marking and preparation time. 23.1% of middle level teachers have 10% ± 0.5% marking and preparation time. 35.7% have between 10 and 15%, 13.3% have between 15 and 20% and 4.2% have more than 20% of their instructional day for marking and preparation.

Percent scheduled Marking and Preparation time – Middle Level Teachers

Percent scheduled Marking and Preparation time	Percent of Teachers
0	6.3%
< 10%	17.5%
10% ± 0.5%	23.1%
10 - 15 %	35.7%
15 - 20 %	13.3%
20% +	4.2%



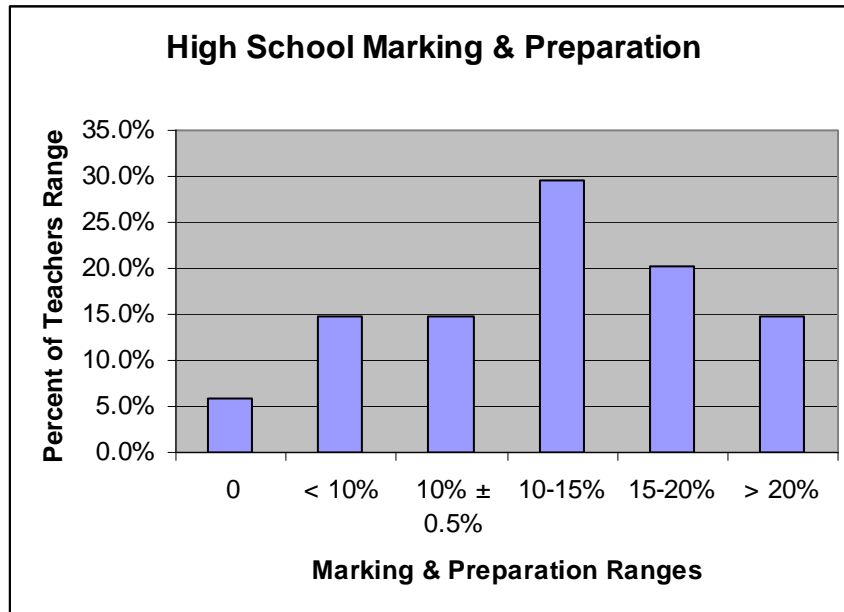
High School

Many high schools in Nova Scotia organize their school year into semesters. In order to determine aggregate marking and preparation numbers for these high schools, the percent of the instructional day scheduled for marking and preparation during first semester was averaged with the percent of the instructional day scheduled for marking and preparation in the second semester. Teachers in unsemestered schools entered the amount of marking and preparation only in the field provided for first semester. If a teacher has a 30-minute time slot scheduled for marking and preparation out of a 300-minute instructional day each day of the school year, the teacher receives 10% marking and preparation time. If that teacher has 30 minutes scheduled in only the first semester and none in the second semester, the teacher has received 5% marking and preparation time over the school year.

There were 169 respondents who reported 50% or more of their assignment at the high school level. Those teachers averaged 12.9% of the instructional day for marking and preparation. This is clearly higher than at either the elementary or middle school experience. At the same time, 5.9% of high school teachers had no marking and preparation time and 14.8% had less than 10% of the instructional day available for learning support activities. 64.5% of high school teachers reported more than 10% marking and preparation time.

Percent scheduled Marking and Preparation time – High School Teachers

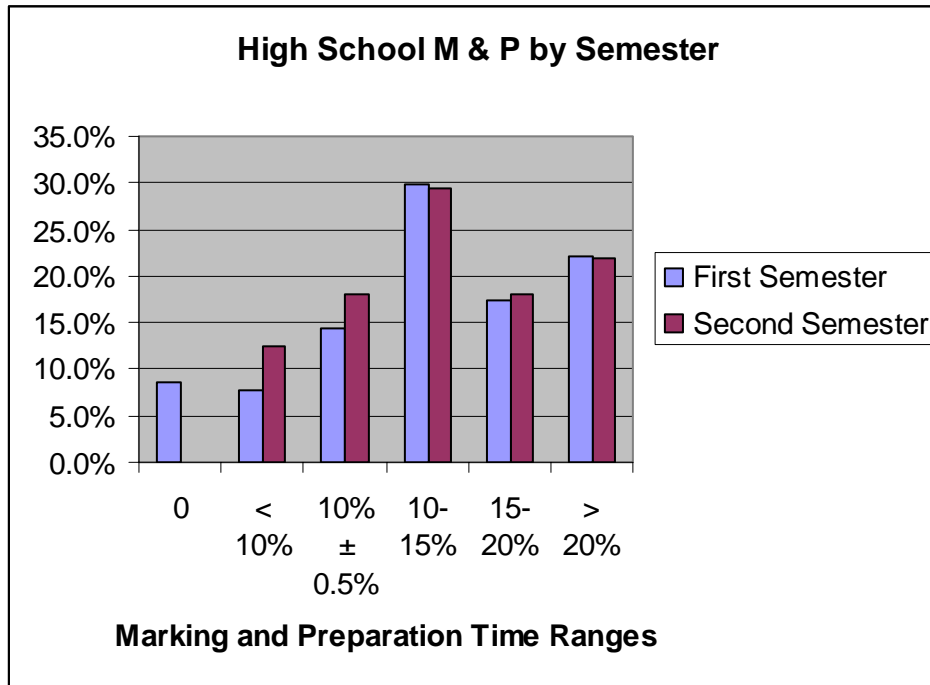
0	5.9%
< 10%	14.8%
10% ± 0.5%	14.8%
10-15%	29.6%
15-20%	20.1%
> 20%	14.8%



High School Marking and Preparation time by semester

The impact of the semester system on marking and preparation time is most noticeable with respect to teachers with less than 10% of the instructional day available to them for such learning support activities. Some teachers, 8.7%, had no marking and preparation time during first semester. The opposite was not true. No teachers in semestered schools reported that they had no

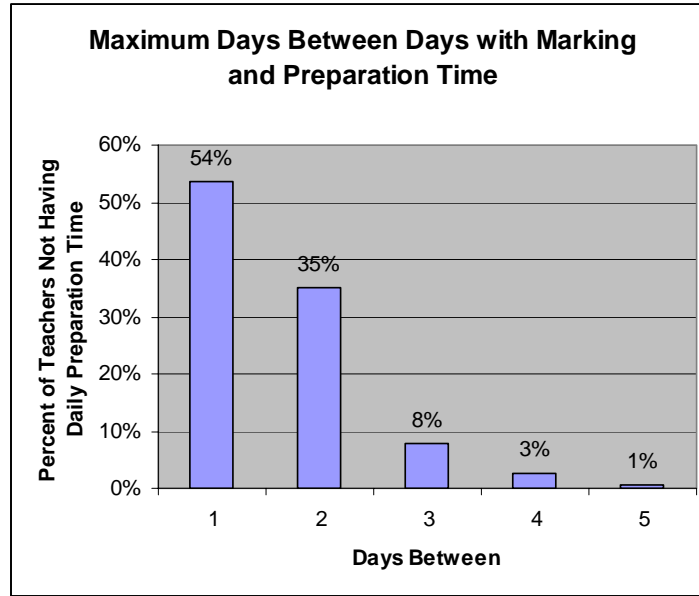
marking and preparation time during the second semester. The proportion of teachers with more than 10% marking and preparation time appears to be essentially the same for both semesters at 69.2% and 69.5% respectively.



Distribution of Marking and Preparation Time Within the Cycle

The contract stipulates that marking and preparation time may be distributed over a “reasonable” time cycle. This has produced many cases in which teachers do not have daily preparation time, even though they receive some time as part of each instructional cycle. This is another source of stress for teachers.

Over half the teachers surveyed, 52%, did not have marking and preparation time on a daily basis. Some teachers had as many as five days between days when they have marking and preparation time, although for most of the teachers without daily marking and preparation time, the maximum is one day. More than one third, 35%, of these teachers had two days between days with scheduled marking and preparation time.



Also of note is the fact that 35% of teachers surveyed did not always have a full period for marking and preparation within the cycle.

Conclusions

Two conclusions have clearly emerged. Both conclusions confirm the Union’s contention with respect to the inequitable distribution of marking and preparation time. First, there are very significant inequities in the distribution of marking and preparation time among teachers. Some teachers have a reasonable amount of time to engage in learning and student support activity. However, too many teachers have no time in the instructional day for this.

Overall, almost seven percent of teachers have no marking and preparation time. A further quarter of teachers (24.6%) have between zero and 10% of the instructional day scheduled for such learning support activities.

Secondly, there are also significant inequities in the availability of marking and preparation time across grade levels.

Elementary teachers are particularly disadvantaged. One in twelve have no time within their workday for marking, preparation and the other learning support activities essential to students and teachers’ professional lives. More than 2/5 (41.4%) of elementary teachers have less than 10% of the instructional day for these activities.

High school teachers have the greatest amount of time allocated for marking and preparation. However, even among this group, almost 6% are faced with no such time and a further one in seven have less than 10 percent. This apparent advantage for high school teachers is likely an artefact of the segmented course structure where learning is compartmentalized into relatively rigid periods combined with larger student, and therefore teacher, populations. This allows for more flexible scheduling and the ability to incorporate marking and preparation time into the schedule. In elementary classrooms, teachers are more likely to be expected to deliver a broad range of subject material by themselves and organize the Department of Education’s suggested time allocation flexibly. Marking and preparation time for elementary teachers is typically

scheduled when the class is engaged in a few “specialty” subjects such as music, art, physical education, etc. that utilize another teacher.

Teachers have indicated they believe adequate marking and preparation time should represent 16% of the instructional day. Only one fifth (22%) have access to this amount of professional time not engaged directly with students.

Teachers are clearly calling for a reasonable level of marking and preparation time. They realize the necessity of additional time in order to conduct the specific practices of marking and lesson preparation. In addition, there are other specific tasks directly related to their immediate concerns that encounter severe time constraints such as contact with parents, conversations with guidance and resource personnel, a plethora of administrivia that often demand teachers’ time, and many other tasks. They also are aware that the enhancement of student learning requires the time in the instructional day during which colleagues can come together to explore ways to enhance the learning environment and address problems, both with individual students and whole classes, collectively.

Teaching has been and continues to be an extremely demanding profession. Expecting teachers to develop professional learning communities in the absence of a reasonable allocation of time to read, plan, dialogue, mark and consult is unrealistic and unreasonable. Not only will teachers be unable to develop an optimum learning environment, they will become subject to unproductive levels of stress. The stress levels that too many teachers are experiencing damage both the health of teachers and their ability to contribute to an effective learning community.

As the province articulates its new agenda for improving the education system in Nova Scotia, it is imperative that its initiatives include enhancing the professional time during the day when teachers can attend to all of the things that make their time in front of students as productive as possible. Providing the best and most effective learning environment cannot be achieved in the absence of a reasonable amount of what we call marking and preparation time.

Appendix A

Marking and Prep Time Survey

Please provide the information about your marking and preparation time. (not staff averages)

School Name: _____

School Address: _____

Number of Students at the School _____ Grade Levels at the School _____

Instructional Cycle: _____ days

Length of instructional day (minutes) _____ Periods per day _____

Grades You Teach (%): _____ High School _____ Middle School/Junior High _____ Elementary

Position (enter percent in each category):

_____ Classroom Teacher _____ Resource Teacher _____ Guidance _____ Administration

First Semester or Yearly schedule:

Marking and Preparation Time: (Minutes per Instructional Cycle) _____

Do you have Marking and Preparation Time available every day? _____ Yes _____ No

If No: Number of Days between Scheduled Marking and Preparation Time:

Maximum _____ Minimum _____

Is your scheduled Marking and Preparation time is always a full period? _____ Yes _____ No

Second Semester (ignore if not applicable)

Marking and Preparation Time: (Minutes per Instructional Cycle) _____

Do you have Marking and Preparation Time available every day? _____ Yes _____ No

If No: Number of Days between Scheduled Marking and Preparation Time:

Maximum _____ Minimum _____

Is your scheduled Marking and Preparation time always a full period? _____ Yes _____ No

Do you believe the amount of Marking and Preparation time available to you is adequate?

_____ Yes _____ No

If No, what is the minimum amount of Marking and Preparation time you believe would be adequate? _____

Additional Comments: (use reverse if required)