

Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement Act

February 2017

The Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement Act creates a contract for members of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, and means the union is no longer in a legal strike position.

The last agreement with the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NSTU) expired July 31, 2015. Government and the union came to three separate tentative agreements:

- November, 2015
- September, 2016
- January, 2017

All agreements were recommended by the union's bargaining team and provincial executive, and rejected by membership vote.

The NSTU directed members to start strike action by partially withdrawing services that lasted from December 5, 2016 to January 23, 2017. The action resumed January 30, 2017.

CLASSROOM CONDITIONS

Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Within 14 days of the bill being passed, a Council to Improve Classroom Conditions will be appointed. The council will have \$20 million over two years to address issues in the classroom.

The council will have the following composition:

- 3 teachers from elementary school
- 3 teachers from middle school
- 3 teachers from high school
- 3 government-appointed representatives
- 1 co-chair appointed by the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union
- 1 co-chair appointed by government

The council has several priority areas to report on by April 30, 2017:

- Data collection and reporting
- Assessment and evaluation
- Timing of administrative days relative to report card preparation
- Student attendance policy(s)
- Technology and work processes, including PowerSchool and TIENET
- Scope of practice for teachers
- Planning for student success
- Complex classrooms
- Class sizes at all grade levels
- Student discipline policy(s)

The council may, over time, also address other items as identified by the council or teachers.

The act will allow for the appointment of an arbitrator in the event the council cannot agree on recommendation and refers the matter to arbitration by majority vote. The arbitrator's decision would be final and binding, but must be within the terms of the committee agreement.

Commission on Inclusive Education

A three-person Commission on Inclusive Education will be struck within 30 days of the bill being passed to examine the model of inclusion for students.

Two experts in the field of inclusive education will be appointed (one by the Minister and one by the union), along with an appropriately qualified expert who will act as independent chair and who will be jointly appointed. Commission members cannot include members of the union or government employees.

The commission will conduct a research-based overview of the current practice and policy of inclusive education and provide recommendations on how the implementation of inclusive education can be improved, including recommendations around funding, resources, and professional development.

The commission will develop a comprehensive strategic plan that includes measurable education goals for implementing inclusive education and specific recommendations for improving teaching and learning conditions in support of the goals.

The commission must return with an interim report by June 30, 2017 to allow for implementation prior to the upcoming school year.

Class sizes

Current P-6 class caps will be maintained:

- Classes for grades primary to two are capped at 20 students, with flexibility.
- Classes for grades three to six are capped at 25 students, with flexibility.

PowerSchool

A letter was sent from the minister to the NSTU committing to examine possible immediate changes to PowerSchool. If changes are possible, they will be implemented as soon as feasible.

“No-fail Policy”

A letter was sent from the deputy minister to school board superintendents confirming and directing that there are to be no policies on retention/failure for students.

Attendance Policy

A letter was sent from the deputy minister to school board superintendents notifying them of the plan to proceed with engagement and implementation on the draft attendance policy.

WAGES & BENEFITS

Four-year agreement: August 1, 2015 – July 31, 2019

The bill provides a wage pattern for teachers which still allows for three per cent over four years:

- Year 1: 0 per cent
- Year 2: 0 per cent
- Year 3: 1 per cent
- Year 4: 1.5 per cent
- On the last day of the agreement: 0.5 per cent
- Newer teachers will continue to receive step increases of up to five per cent per year

Retirement bonuses will be frozen and based on the salary a teacher makes upon retirement, as per the three tentative agreements. Department of Finance and Treasury Board will immediately begin work to create a program to provide employees with the option to access the public service award earlier than retirement.

