

President's Message: Inclusivity

We hear a lot about inclusion in our workplace. The Oxford Dictionary defines inclusion as “the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure,” but also adds the scientific definition, “a body or particle recognizably distinct from the substance in which it is embedded.” These two definitions, perhaps, capture the challenges we face with the educational definition of inclusion. In our classrooms, we work to provide a place and a program for all students who enter, necessitating the management and guidance of large range of “recognizably distinct” students. The Appropriate Educational Programming Regulation outlines how this is to work, specifically: “a school board must ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, appropriate educational programming is available to a pupil in a regular class of his or her peers...” the regulation then helpfully defines “appropriate educational programming” as “the curriculum.” It is, therefore, the school board’s duty, under the law, to ensure that, within reason, in a class of his or her peers, the curriculum is available to each student. The Regulation goes on to state that when “the teacher and resource teacher, ... are unable to assess why the pupil is having difficulty meeting ... outcomes; or [are] of the opinion that differentiated instruction and adaptations are insufficient to assist the pupil in meeting those outcomes” the principal must “ensure that a pupil is referred for a specialized assessment...” Why am I telling you all this? Legislation is the ultimate guide on how we are to run our schools. The legislation clearly lays out a division of responsibilities. Teachers are to use “differentiated instruction and adaptations” to assist students in achieving outcomes. When this is deemed insufficient, it is up to principals to ensure further assessment is conducted, and it is the Board of Trustees that is ultimately charged with ensuring that an education is available to all students. In other words, according to the legislation, classroom teachers are not in this alone. As the board prepares for the next strategic plan, it is up to us to communicate what is working and what the board can do better as to meet its legislative obligations. As the President of the Association, one of my duties is to act as a liaison with the division administration and the board. Let me know how we can improve things and I will pass it on. One way to do that is to use the Contact Form on the ITA website: interlaketeachers.ca.

Media Smart Resources

The Canadian Teachers’ Federation in conjunction with MediaSmarts recently concluded Media Literacy Week. This year the theme was “Inclusion in a Connected World: A Place and a Voice for Everyone.” These organizations seek to educate young people about the power of media for good and the ability of media to skew and influence public perception. Knowledge is power, and the goal is to empower young people in a media rich world. Educational resources for teachers and for families from are available online at medialiteracyweek.ca and mediasmarts.ca.



Evaluations of Professional Staff

Occasionally, I find the time to go spelunking in the ISD policy manual. It is my plan this year, as time and whitespace allow, to do a deep dive into the policy manual to, hopefully, bring up a nugget or two. Thus, with my metaphors thoroughly mixed, here goes the first attempt.

Policy B-3 deals with the evaluation of employees. B-3, subsection 1.1 describes the process by which teachers receive a formal evaluation in year one and year four and then are on professional growth every third year thereafter. Clinicians have a slightly different rhythm. An interim report for professional staff new to the division is also to be completed by October 31st or 40 teaching days after employment commences. The policy does allow for teachers to be put on formal evaluation “when the need arises.” “When the need arises” is either due to a request for an additional formal evaluation by a teacher or clinician, or a supervisor might deem one to be necessary. If you find yourself under formal evaluation outside of the normal pattern, you are advised to seek the advice of the ITA President and/or an MTS staff officer.



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The policy goes on to articulate that teachers and clinicians are to be “informed of the criteria, procedure, purpose, appeal procedures, and timelines of the evaluation.” Further procedures are outlined as follows: (1) a pre-visitation conference with the teacher/clinician; and (2) a minimum of three pre-arranged observations (within a reasonable time frame). Once the evaluation is complete, a post evaluation conference is mandated after which both parties are to sign the final report. Remember, you are signing to acknowledge that you have read the report; you are not being asked whether you agree or disagree with it. All this must be completed by April 30 of the school year in question – with a reasonable timeline preceding April 30.

If any of the steps listed above have been missed or if you disagree with your supervisor’s evaluation, you may appeal. The appeal process has many, somewhat tight, deadlines, so if you are at all thinking about an appeal, you should contact the ITA President and/or MTS staff to assist you with the process. The process is as follows.

The first step in the appeal is, as it should be, an informal conversation with your supervisor; hopefully any misunderstandings or miscommunications can be ironed out at that level. You may request ITA or MTS representation at such a meeting. If this informal conversation is unsatisfactory to you, you may appeal in writing to your supervisor within seven teaching days of signing and receiving the report. Your supervisor must then respond in writing within 14 teaching days of the date you signed and received the report by either amending the report or by giving written notification that the report will not be amended. You may then, again in writing, appeal to the superintendent within 21 teaching days of signing and receiving the report. The superintendent must then discuss the report with you within 7 teaching days of receiving the appeal. You may withdraw an appeal at any time.

Hopefully all your evaluations are a positive experience; however, if there are disagreements, know that there is a process, and know that your union is here to support you in that process.