



Societal changes led to urgency in STF reaching tentative agreement

By his own admission, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation President Patrick Maze said he would not have signed off on the rather unexpected tentative Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement that was announced April 22 if it had been presented two weeks earlier.

However, speaking on behalf of the Teachers' Bargaining Committee, Maze underscored that things have changed irrevocably during the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic. That meant long-term stability for teachers was paramount in order to try to alleviate at least one of the stress factors being experienced by the province's 13,500 educators as they continue to adjust to work life outside the classroom.

The tentative four-year agreement calls for two percent increases in 2020 through to 2022 and is in effect from September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2023. There will be equal increments in allowances for principals, vice-principals and assistant principals. Moreover, all school boards will now be obliged to provide the Federation with contact information of all approved substitute teachers.

Although somewhat tepid in his analysis, Maze said, "things have changed so quickly and with the downhill trajectory in the economy, we felt we should

put it in front of teachers to give them voice."

While some teachers have openly questioned the length of the tentative four-year agreement, Maze said it allows the STF to pursue some other things that are in the queue while also allowing ample time for the revamped committee looking at the much-talked-about class size and composition to come up with some tangible potential solutions.

According to Maze, the agreement of the provincial government to overhaul the aforementioned committee was a catalyst in the two sides reopening negotiations and thereby coming to a consensus. Maze said the new committee will be similar in composition to the Response Planning Team that has drawn plaudits for its work during the COVID-19 crisis.

The committee will include two members of the STF's own choosing as well as similar representation from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association,

the Saskatchewan League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials and the Ministry of Education, as well as the deans of education from the universities of Saskatchewan and Regina.

Maze suggested the STF, which had long insisted on the inclusion of class size and composition in the provincial collective bargaining talks, will be keeping a close eye on the committee and what tangible results it might be able to provide.

"Class complexity has not been solved; students, teachers and parents deserve better. If this committee fails to provide adequate recommendations or the government fails to implement sufficient supports to alleviate classroom complexity, the Federation will still seek to have it addressed in future contract negotiations or other mechanisms," Maze observed.

Students remain primary focus for Executive members in this 'new world'

As anyone living on this planet can attest, normalcy has left the train station, and in its wake is a rapidly evolving journey into what is still an unknown future for any of us.

Teachers across the province are in a similar position while experiencing the unprecedented closure of schools everywhere.

They may have different levels of comfort with the requisite technology that is needed to meet this new remote teaching environment, but they are in unanimous agreement that meeting the needs of their students in this new world is the chief priority.

"Talking with teachers at my school [Luseland] and seeing all the emails they are receiving, the focus for sure seems to be on connecting with students and providing the best-possible education opportunities for them, while at the same time not overwhelming them or their parents," offered Micheal Hagel.

"The school year isn't over for my daughter [10 years old] or for my wife and I, and I don't think the school year is over for teachers as long as there are students out there working and willing to learn," Hagel added.

Vince Mamer, who teaches high school in Saskatoon, said that while such tools as Google Classroom can serve as an effective platform for delivery, he is also mindful

of not being overly reliant on livestreaming. He wants to create opportunities for students to access learning when it best fits into their respective schedules.

"As teachers, it's about reaching out in any way we can. Ultimately, we don't want students to experience a huge learning gap when this all ends. Maybe you don't reach all the outcomes, but it's about focusing on the core skills they need," Mamer said.

"A lot of this comes down to whether students can establish a day-to-day routine, and that means you can log in regularly and take a break so you're not overwhelmed. As teachers, we're not here to rewrite the online content. We want our students to keep learning and to hopefully adapt."

"During this pandemic, we as a staff are really concentrating on making sure we have the resources available so that kids can continue to learn. That is definitely our priority above all else," said Karen Kennedy-Allin, who teaches in Weyburn.

There is also the loss of daily communication with students that troubles teachers, including Samantha Becotte, Vice-President of the Executive, who teaches high school in Lloydminster.

"It's about the relationships you build with your students and for some, school is their safe place. I have students



Patrick Maze, STF President

Maze said he is cautiously optimistic that this committee has more of the traditional education stakeholders with a voice in the process.

"I think government recognizes this is still a serious issue and we're willing to give this committee a chance to respond to some very complex issues," Maze said.

Although the provincial government's original offer of \$1,500 per member was no longer part of the agreement, Maze was not disappointed

with that outcome. That offer was somewhat of a ruse, cited Maze, since the money would have come from the teachers' own health plan and would have been considered taxable income. With the increase in health costs currently being experienced he felt it was more advantageous for the Members' Health Plan to remain strongly funded into the future.

As another factor, Maze said in recent times there has been a definite upsurge in public support for teachers—owed in no small part to the fact they are seeing more of what teachers do with their students on a daily basis as a result of this impromptu digital learning environment.

As he mused about the reopening of schools in the fall, Maze feels confident that, if ratified, this agreement will provide genuine stability for teachers while reducing one stressor from their lives.

The first-time-ever provincial collective bargaining electronic vote takes place May 19, 20 and 21. n

who come by for coffee and a chat because they need that trusted adult they can talk to about what they are feeling. Losing out on that daily human contact is definitely a worry for me right now," she acknowledged.

"... we're learning together. Some schools in the division want to go slow with this new reality and some want to go full tilt... You can't possibly plan for it, but we're tracking as best we can in terms of arranging supports for our students ..."

Nathan Bromm

There has also been considerable focus on trying to provide parents with as much information as possible, while also striving to allay their anxiety over what has become a stressful situation for all concerned.

The reality for many families is the unavailability or lack of access to the sort of online delivery that has now become the best alternative while classrooms are off limits.

Neal Boutin, who teaches in Gull Lake as part of the sparsely populated Chinook Division, explained that getting access to students is not as easy as it might sound

for some in fairly remote areas. Thus, employees such as bus drivers and educational assistants have proven invaluable in terms of getting extra supports to some students and their families.

"This is an equity issue in terms of access to the supports, so we have been concentrating on planning and trying to make sure everyone has what they need. I feel good about what we've been able to do by working together," Boutin added.

Nathan Bromm, who is a principal in Moosomin, has experienced some of those same realities where a lack of access can be a serious issue.

"We're all over the map, but we're learning together. Some schools in the division want to go slow with this new reality and some want to go full tilt. It's not like we have all the answers for something like this. You can't possibly plan for it, but we're tracking as best we can in terms of arranging supports for our students because that's what this is all about."

According to Becotte, her division is grappling with what the essential outcomes are and ultimately what students need most.

"As far as technology goes, I just really dipped my toe into some of the video lessons in the fall and it's different for sure, but I guess it will serve us well in the future if this is going to be the new norm. Teachers will find ways to adjust in terms of delivery. In future, I could see more virtual learning for some of the rural classes, but I would be concerned if it became

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all about online learning.” She also underscored the importance of establishing and trying to maintain a regular routine for students and teachers alike.

Of course, teachers are in that same situation whereby they now find themselves as not only teachers but also assuming more of a hands-on daily routine with young children.

Ben Goby, who teaches elementary school in Regina, readily concedes that has been an adjustment while both he and his wife (also a teacher) adjust to this new reality.

“It’s been an adventure for sure, but this whole experience gives a person some different perspectives and you learn some new tools. Sometimes it might mean you do your school work at night but you’re still engaged and it can be enjoyable too,” he noted.

Bromm added his voice to the situation, observing that while his administrative duties remain, he is also trying to help his wife find activities for their children, who are four years apart, given the reality of social distancing.

“It’s a challenge for sure and right now it lacks structure,” he joked, while adding that he’s sure that will come with time.

Kennedy-Allin indicated she has been inspired by the way her teaching colleagues have answered the call given the new reality thrust upon them.

“... this whole experience gives a person some different perspectives and you learn some new tools.”

Ben Goby

“It’s been awesome to see how teachers have stepped up through this and it inspires me to do whatever I can for my students. I’ve promised those who are looking to upgrade their marks that I will work with them into the summer if they want me to.”

Becotte concurred, adding “teachers will find ways to adjust when something like this happens. For sure it’s a



Members of the STF Executive are like colleagues throughout the province in this remote learning environment by juggling at-home duties. Clockwise from left: Samantha Becotte is pictured with children Addison and Hayden, while Karen-Kennedy Allin, like many others, has fit in some culinary time. Vince Mamer and Nathan Bromm are ready to answer the call from their “offices.”

major shift in how we assess understanding, but that’s what you need to be able to do.”

The two educators were also in agreement that the biggest void with the online delivery model is not having that intuitive sense of what the classroom is really like and being able to readily assess if students are encountering problems.

“For me that’s the hardest part; this is not experiential learning. You’re not able to adjust on the fly based on the immediate feedback and so you don’t have the atmosphere that exists in a classroom when you look into a student’s eyes as a sign, for example.”

Kennedy-Allin did say though that judging by her early experiences, students are motivated—she teaches Physics and Biology 30.

Becotte agreed, while adding that when it comes to high school students, whether it’s online or in the classroom, they need to take their share of responsibility if it’s their intention to upgrade their marks in pursuing post-secondary options.

There was a strong sense of commonality among Executive members in lauding their

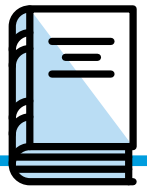
respective divisions for helping to make sure supports are available for all students.

Debbie Ward, who has full-time release as president of the Regina Catholic Schools Teachers’ Association, observed that she has seen first-hand how supportive the board has been, which she said is corroborated by the fact she has fielded very few calls from teachers who are left feeling unsupported.

“Life is out of control right now, and who knows what it will look like in five years. But overall, I think we’re seeing people within the education sector pulling together for the students,” she said.

“When I’ve talked to the families of my students, there’s just so much on their minds right now that sometimes as educators we have to take a back seat and just be there for them and play our part. People are taking this day by day and that applies to all of us,” Goby observed. “But I would give the division and the government an A plus in terms of delivering data to teachers and trying to respond to all that is going on.” n

RESOURCE CONNECTIONS



By Joan Elliott, Librarian/Manager,
Emma Stewart Resources Centre

Our world has been turned upside down as teaching and learning, our mental and emotional health, and economic well-being have all been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The vulnerabilities in our social and economic structures have been starkly revealed causing us to rethink their sustainability and to reflect on the lessons learned. The past few months have also demonstrated the kindness, resilience, adaptability and creativity of educators and families who are working together to meet the needs of students in these difficult times.

There are a number of online supports available for teachers, students and families. The Teaching and Support section on the Saskatchewan Curriculum site at www.edonline.sk.ca provides links to recommended print, video and website resources in English and in French. Free video resources are available on ROVER and REVEL by accessing Blackboard accounts that have been set up for all teachers and students in Saskatchewan.

The STF Professional Learning website called Supports for Teachers at www.stfprofessionallearning.ca contains K-12 curriculum resources in English and French, as well as leadership and mental wellness resources and suggestions for teaching remotely.

The library of the Alberta Teachers’ Association also maintains a great collection of online teaching resources. The ATA Library’s 2Learn Subject Guides at <https://library.teachers.ab.ca> feature many engaging links for topics in K-12 curricula.

Another valuable digital resource is entitled *A New Reality: Getting Remote Learning Right*, which is a special report from the highly regarded journal *Educational Leadership*. Thoughtful suggestions are offered in articles such as Keep It Simple, Schools; Restoring Connection: Real-Life Advice on Transitioning to Online Learning; Accommodations, Modifications, and Intervention at a Distance; Maintaining Connections, Reducing Anxiety While School Is Closed; and Cybersecurity Guidelines for Remote Learning. *Educational Leadership* is published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; it is available free of charge at www.ascd.org.

The Emma Stewart Resources Centre also has a myriad of links to online resources. By going to the Centre’s section at www.stf.sk.ca and clicking on Resources, you will find Related Links on such topics as curriculum, Indigenous education and wellness. In addition, the Bibliographies page has project-based learning, inquiry, online teaching and learning, trauma-informed practice, and mindfulness highlight books that can be borrowed from the Centre.

Scores of exciting books on online teaching and learning and tech tools are available for borrowing. *The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips*, by Judith V. Boettcher and Rita-Marie Conrad, discusses core principles and best practices for online teaching, practical teaching strategies and ideas for reflecting on the journey so far and for looking forward. *Creating the Anywhere, Anytime Classroom: A Blueprint for Learning Online in Grades K-12*, by Casey Reason, Lisa Reason and Crystal Guiler, describes various types of digital learning experiences and how to plan curriculum and assessment, initiate, maintain and conclude the learning experience, as well as ways of teaching online collaboration and of dealing with challenging behaviours.

The book *50 Things You Can Do With Google Classroom*, by Alice Keeler and Libbi Miller, gives an overview of the Google Classroom app which was designed to streamline the process of integrating technology and going digital. Their subsequent book *50 Things to Go Further With Google Classroom: A Student-Centered Approach*, illustrates how teachers can construct meaningful digital learning activities, foster student questions and create collaborative learning experiences.

Another popular and practical book is *50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective* by Angela Cleveland and Stephen Sharp. Tools for groups and lessons, collaboration and keeping organized are presented as ways of overcoming barriers and connecting with the whole student.

To borrow these and other resources, please email esrc@stf.sk.ca or call 1-800-667-7762. n

Executive members have experienced many emotions this past year

Contemplate for a moment the craziest roller coaster you could envision and then maybe times that tenfold.

Teachers throughout the province can all attest to how the last seven months or so have been since the current school year started in the fall before abruptly ending when the COVID-19 global pandemic invaded our lives and schools were closed for an indefinite period of time.

Now suppose you are a member of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Executive. Perhaps you start with the protracted provincial collective bargaining process, complete with an impasse being declared, followed by unsuccessful conciliation and soon after, the overwhelming support of 13,500 teachers to embark on sanctions.

The sanctions had barely taken hold before the whole pandemic scenario usurped pretty much everything else in daily life as we have known it. So with what's to follow being consigned to the unknown, the *Saskatchewan Bulletin* did a call around to those who are entrusted with making some rather hefty decisions on behalf of the profession and teachers—and that's at the best of times.

When reviewing the ups and downs of the past months, there is unanimous agreement amongst the Executive that it has been unparalleled in terms of the emotional experiences it has brought. Joy followed by deflating sorrow have been pretty much the standard course of events.

Neal Boutin, for one, chose to divide the year into three distinct chapters in order to maintain some semblance of balance.

As a sage veteran of the profession with 25 years under his belt, Boutin shared how in the fall he was full of optimism because of what he cited as such a great staff at Gull Lake School.

"It started as one of the best years I've had. Everyone worked so well together and it was uplifting. Our division had experienced some pretty serious cuts in the past few years, but we were finally making it work.

"Then came bargaining and all that was involved until we got to the sanctions vote. I like to be positive but I'm also a realist. I was thinking we might get 70 percent (in fact the resounding yes vote came in at more than 90 percent). This was the third time I've experienced sanctions, and I think we were just better prepared this time and it demonstrated teachers' resolve. I remember being so impressed with the resolve teachers showed."

Ben Goby, meanwhile, said for him it has just been since the new year that things have really taken off. Prior to that, he had found himself settling into a new school and finding out who were his new colleagues. It was pretty much business as usual.

"I wasn't that optimistic about bargaining and we were just catching our breath before the sanctions vote. Then you could get excited about that [sanctions], and then it's just been so fast in terms of how this pandemic has moved. It's been pretty tumultuous. Overall though, this is probably the most rewarding year on the Executive for me personally, and we've made a strong connection with the membership. I feel like we're on track in terms of where we want to go as an organization."

Fellow Executive member Debbie Ward acknowledged, "there's just been so much change happening that you're constantly having to adjust and rebuild. I have so much admiration for Randy [Schmaltz, STF Executive Director] and Patrick [Maze, STF President]. As a group, we've put so much time and effort into this year and now who knows what's going to happen. It's out of control in so many ways."

"I was holding my breath with sanctions, but I can't tell you how thrilled I was to see those numbers. It indicates to me that teachers are on the same page and they are committed to the profession and supporting learning. They were there when we really needed them to be."

Karen Kennedy-Allin

Karen Kennedy-Allin could readily relate to those swings in emotion, citing her original optimism when the bargaining talks entered the conciliation stage, only "for that optimism to be quashed because I had a lot of faith in the process. I was holding my breath with sanctions, but I can't tell you how thrilled I was to see those numbers. It indicates to me that teachers are on the same page and they are committed to the profession and supporting learning. They were there when we really needed them to be."

Nathan Bromm is another of those buoyed by what he has seen develop prior to this most recent setback; he referred to how we promote the organization to members and public alike.

"I have seen a lot of transition and a shifting in our culture so I was really enjoying how things were going, and I was excited to see things coming to fruition. In my view, we've seen a lot of strong public support for teachers, and even in this crazy world we find ourselves in, I think there has been a significant shift in how the public views education—and that's wonderful."

Nadine Jennison is in her first year on the Executive and, to say the least, she has found it exciting and simultaneously very much of



The STF Executive is shown in happier times and without the constraints of physical distancing. Those who have worked tirelessly during this tumultuous year are as follows: Front row (from left) Micheal Hagel, Vice-President Samantha Becotte, Karen Kennedy-Allin, President Patrick Maze. Back row (from left) Nadine Jennison, Debbie Ward, Neal Boutin, Vince Mamer, Ben Goby and Nathan Bromm. – File photo

a roller coaster ride.

Add to that, the fact that while she received a negative test for COVID-19, she had been quite sick for a matter of three weeks before starting to recover.

"I've been trying to stay positive, and I've seen lots of encouraging things in the education sector. Our division [Horizon] has been great in terms of coming up with gift cards for our families who really need it. There's been so much empathy, and I'm proud of our division and how people are working together."

So if the recent past has been unpredictable at times, where does that leave the future while so-called experts vacillate from doom-and-gloom, worst-case scenarios to speculation on what the landscape will look like? Members of the Executive are no different.

Goby succinctly offered his views that "right at this time, all bets are off and as educators we will have to try to nurse our students and families through this. We will have to adapt and use the new tools we have learned because things are going to be different. We also can't overlook the mental health aspect of all this in the long term."

Bromm noted that this has opened the door for there to be greater collaboration among teachers in looking for innovative solutions and that includes colleagues from other divisions—a trend he hopes will continue.

Here's the \$64 million question—given what you have experienced, would you in retrospect have misgivings about being part of the Executive? Clearly, the answer should be an unequivocal no. Here is a sampling of their respective responses:

Mamer: "Right now we're a victim of really bad timing, but I think prior to this, it's been my most enjoyable year. We have done some really good work. In terms of governance, for example, we continue to do our very best in terms of looking after the Federation, and right now we have to be patient and wait and see. This is important work we're doing."

Ward: "For society there will be changes, but we have tried our very best to improve relations with the government in particular. I'm hopeful when this ends that we will be able to work together and that the public and government will be more supportive of teachers. It's an important time to stick together."

Kennedy-Allin: "The effects of this pandemic will be felt for a long time, but I'm hopeful that there will be a real investment in education because the research shows that funding education is an investment in our future. I'm a big believer that in times of economic uncertainty, it's more important than ever. I very much look forward to helping teachers to have more voice in the future."

Goby: "This is what it's all about. Leadership is about showing a strong hand and being the calm in the storm. Being a part of a team like this is motivating. I'm thrilled to be part of this and it's what we signed up for. We have shown with sanctions and the work we have done together that teachers are tired of their working conditions and we can do better. I want to be part of working towards that."

Boutin: "We're looking at a new reality in education, but I think as a member of the Executive, we've done some really important work.

I feel confident in the direction we're going. We work well together and have a strong focus on where we need to go."

Bromm: "I'm proud of what we have been able to accomplish in terms of how we have brought some of the key issues to the awareness of the public. I am confident we're sending a positive message to teachers across the province in how we are working as a Federation."

Becotte: "For sure I'm glad to be part of the Executive—what's not to like. I'm one of those people who would rather be able to hopefully effect change, as opposed to sitting back and complaining about how things are. I don't know if I want to say it's an olive branch, but I have faith in [Education] Minister Wyant and in his desire to try to persuade his colleagues that we need more funding for education."

Jennison: "For sure it's been a steep learning curve, but I think the team has shown real courage in how they have handled everything that's been thrown at us. There is such a strong commitment to fight for the profession and for our students. It's all been very exciting to be part of."

Hagel: "Being part of the Executive (and with the STF and my local association) has been the thing I have most enjoyed about being a teacher and what has probably kept me in the profession as long as I have. There is no organization that does as much to fight for what is best for education for both teachers and students. Teachers will always do what is best for kids, and I think the STF is there to make sure we do what is best for teachers because that is what is best for kids too." n

Opportunity to share

If you peruse the articles on what the members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Executive are up to while sharing their thoughts during this unprecedented time of remote at-home learning, it is clearly an experience all educators in the province can relate to.

Should any of you wish to reach out and share your experiences—either via the written word or through pictures—we at the *Saskatchewan Bulletin* would like to extend an invitation to contribute to the last edition of this current publishing year. The publication (digital version only) is scheduled for June 17 with a submission deadline of Friday, June 5. It's entirely your call folks.

An open letter from a teacher: The challenges of education in these unprecedented times

By Shayna Zubko,
Esterhazy Central High School

COVID-19 has changed the reality for people around the world in the last couple of weeks. This includes approximately 1.5 billion students globally. As a teacher, I have around 110 students from Grades 8 to 12 that should be coming through my classroom every day.

For my students and myself, our world has been turned upside down and we all have to adjust to the new realities that have been outlined not only by COVID-19 but also by the Government of Saskatchewan, communities and circumstances. The question has become what is the “new” direction for education and how will we as teachers meet the needs of our students?

First off, the school closure announcement by the Government of Saskatchewan came as a surprise to many teachers. We as a professional community had no notion or prior knowledge that the announcement would be made. Students in my class were getting messages from their parents before I, as a teacher, knew what was happening because schools and school divisions were told approximately the same time as the media. This left a wave of chaos as a flurry of questions were thrown at my fellow teachers and me, and we had no additional knowledge, comfort or any kind of certainty to provide to our students.

“... I worry about students not getting what they need for post-secondary learning, whether that is calculus, crucial writing skills, or practical skills and hours gained through practical and applied arts.”

Shayna Zubko

Not only that, but within hours students were out of the school and were removed by parents. We were left with largely empty classrooms for the remainder of the week to “wind things down.” I think many teachers, myself included, were left in a state of shock and sadness.

As a teacher of Grade 12 students, I struggled to grapple with the reality of not having any closure at the end of the school year nor being able to send those students off with a grand celebration in graduation. Also, celebrating the successes of the school year with students from every other grade and being happy for them to move on to the next adventure in learning, culminating in their advancement to the next grade, was not possible.

In addition, we were presented with a number of new norms, which we were forced to accept from our esteemed government that promised every student credits and advancement and continually changed the guiding protocols for us as teachers. It left many of us confused, wondering how to prepare and when the next change in direction would come.

This leads me to a new state of worry and wonder that is our day-to-day life now. As many of us adjust to working from home, which in itself presents so many challenges, we are still worrying about our students as we are trying to reach out and connect with them.

Students have been given the option to opt in or opt out of supplemental learning to try to alleviate the enormous potential gaps in learning that this three-month break could leave in our students. A focus on math, reading and writing has been mandated, rightfully so, for our younger students. However, the immediate future education of high school students remains optional.

Personally, I worry about students not getting what they need for post-secondary learning, whether that is calculus, crucial writing skills, or practical skills and hours gained through practical and applied arts. Although many teachers are tech-savvy and incredibly creative, there is still a limit to how much can be gleaned through an online platform. There is a reason we have been stressing attendance as key to our students for years!

As teachers, we are “re-learning how to do education” and to many that is incredibly stressful. Not only that, but we have to ask ourselves “what do I teach?” We have been left to decide what is essential for our students to learn. This is a major struggle for people who love learning and want to share all the knowledge they can with their students, or at least it is for me. All of this leaves an overwhelming air of anxiety for what September will look like.

In addition, because teachers are incredibly caring human beings, we are worried about our students. There are so many students who come to school every day because it is their happy place or their safe space. They come to school to socialize, hang out with their friends and take part in a wonderful variety of activities that help them to grow, become themselves and thrive. Not only that, but teachers are role models, supporters, guidance givers and number-one fans of their students. This too leaves a huge gap in the lives of our students. I miss my students and I also miss my colleagues.

Two things have become very clear to me in the new world of physical distancing, homebound education and the general chaos created by a global pandemic. People are incredibly creative—have

you seen the tremendously clever memes being made? People are also developing a newfound appreciation and love for teachers. As I mentioned earlier, teachers are creative people; we are going to work our hardest to create and deliver content electronically to our students. We are still going to work on having some kind of connection with our students.

“I keep seeing posts from parents about how they are having to provide some home education. To me as a teacher, social media is providing unnecessary pressure on parents in an already stressful time. My message—we got this.”

Shayna Zubko

Although I realize that students have diverse abilities to access what will be provided by teachers, the hope is that we can help our students be successful like usual. School divisions are also working to make sure that students will be able to access the content provided by teachers at home. I keep seeing posts from parents about how they are having to provide some home education. To me as a teacher, social media is providing unnecessary pressure on parents in an already stressful time. My message—we got this.

Teachers are still working to provide some form of adapted and flexible education to their students. It may just require a bit more patience since we are only learning about the expectations of us being outlined from above. And if you want to give us all the money like some of those social media posts suggest, I don't think anyone would object (just joking).

There has been a lot of support among teachers globally in providing resources to one another to get through this time and discussing pedagogy via digital education. I have personally talked with and shared resources with teachers from across the province of Saskatchewan and love that we can stay in communication during a time of distancing. And of course, we have our own staff members and the continual guidance of our administrators. I tell you, they have been champions in fielding questions because there have been so many questions.

Education has always been a challenging profession and now the world has thrown a proverbial wrench of all wrenches into the mix. But, the positive is that technology is working in our

EDITORIAL



Timing and perspective can't be overlooked

Suppose you weren't one of the province's 13,500 teachers, chances are you would barely even realize that, oh yes, the Teachers' Bargaining Committee and the Government-Trustee Bargaining Committee actually thrashed out a four-year agreement.

Of course, there's the little matter of teachers voting to ratify the deal, which we should know how that turns out by mid-May or so.

Predictably, there has been considerable feedback from teachers including those who are dead set against a pact that provides only modest two percent salary hikes starting in September and the two subsequent years. There is also less than unanimous satisfaction with the fact that this is a four-year deal. Too long some folks say.

In an effort to be succinct, I offer only this: timing and perspective are key in this scenario.

By his own admission, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation President Patrick Maze said he wouldn't have agreed to this tentative deal if he had been presented with it just a few weeks earlier. At that time, the STF was riding the crest of the wave after the incredibly successful sanctions vote and apparent strong public support.

Then along came COVID-19 and the world as we knew it came to an abrupt halt. It wasn't so much that the goalposts had been moved; they had been ripped out of the ground. In their place was not only the seemingly unstoppable surges in cases, but also the daily updates that were hardly a source of uplifting news in most cases. Experts were dug up from every corner of the planet and each one had a more somber prediction than the other.

So against that backdrop, to suddenly have emerged with an agreement after months of acrimony and behind-the-scenes machinations, could there be a signed deal as well? Some might say it is somewhat underwhelming. Again, people, contemplate the reality. Conciliation was never going to solve this, and from the outset, it was clear class size and composition wouldn't be part of any deal either. The revamped committee to look into this very real problem might be a step in the right direction if we allow ourselves to be guardedly optimistic.

Right now it's safe to say nobody knows what the future looks like six months down the road, but given the thousands of job losses and the overall economic woes, maybe four years of security isn't such a bad thing. And don't forget folks, you actually get to have a vote this time as it stands right now.

If this pandemic has taught us one thing for absolute certain—there is an acute need for people to work together, to help each other and to trust. This would be a great starting point. n

<p><small>SASKATCHEWAN</small> BULLETIN</p> <p>The <i>Saskatchewan Bulletin</i> is published 10 times during the school year by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Contributions to the <i>Bulletin</i> are welcome and will be used when possible.</p> <p>All material is subject to editing. Requests for coverage by <i>Bulletin</i> staff should be received at least three weeks before the event.</p> <p>Editor: Jens Nielsen</p>	<p>Publications Mail Agreement No. 40064493 Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses To:</p> <p>Editorial Office 2317 Arlington Avenue Saskatoon SK S7J 2H8 Tel: 306-373-1660/1-800-667-7762 Fax: 306-374-1122 Email: bulletin@stf.sk.ca</p> <p>©2020. For permission to reprint, please contact the editorial office. Indexed in the Canadian Education Index ISSN 0036-4886 Member of the Canadian Educational Press Association and the Educational Press Association of America. Return postage guaranteed.</p>
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favour at this time. There are a dozen different online platforms, if not more, being used by teachers throughout the country to provide content to students.

In conclusion, I am reminding myself that the unknown is what we are all presently facing. Although the situation is frustrating and we all felt wholeheartedly unprepared and continue to feel unprepared, we must focus on our own needs and those of our students.

This brings to mind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs where the focus is on the psychological well-being of students (and me as a teacher) before making sure that they are being creative, evaluative and analytical according to Bloom's Taxonomy.

So we will battle through dealing with constant distractions at home, including our pet co-workers and newly created workspaces, and try to do what we have learned to do best—teach. n

Scribe implores delegates to consider complete truth on path to reconciliation

By Ellen Whiteman,
Manager, McDowell Foundation

Anyone who has organized a large-scale event has likely had this nightmare. Ninety minutes prior to opening, and with 1,400 delegates waiting expectantly for the morning keynote, the keynote is unable to appear.

For Chris Scribe, founder and organizer of the Think Indigenous International Education Conference, the circumstances around the mid-March outbreak of COVID-19 made the above scenario a reality for the 2020 conference held in Edmonton.

In typical Scribe fashion, he took what could have been a conference-ending cancellation over increased fears of the spread of the virus and turned it into an incredible opportunity to share, not only his passion for Indigenous Education, but also his gift of storytelling.

Scribe is Nakota/Nehiyaw (Assiniboine/Cree) from the Carry the Kettle Nakoda Nation and is grounded in his Indigenous culture, language and tradition. Foundational to his worldview is the life teachings of his father and grandmother.

Scribe is well-known across Canada as an advocate for Indigenous knowledge in education. Currently the director of the Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan, he founded Think Indigenous in 2015, and it has grown to become the largest grassroots Indigenous education conference in Canada. The aim of Think Indigenous is to bring together Indigenous thinkers from across "Turtle Island" to share innovations that support schools, communities and students.

In the absence of a keynote speaker, Scribe took the stage at his own event out

of necessity. However, his message focused on the ongoing need for truth as part of the truth and reconciliation movement, which resonated with the audience of primarily educators, Elders and other leaders.

The core of Scribe's message was that the truth being shared in Canada's current era of truth and reconciliation is only a slice of the historical reality experienced by Indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada focused on the stories of residential school survivors as well as the lost stories of the many children who perished in the schools and never returned home.

The work of the Commission and its 94 Calls to Action has meant that these stories are being increasingly taught within Canadian schools. While, admittedly, these are important steps on Canada's path to reconciliation, Scribe maintained that the rest of the story and truth remains to be told.

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Chris Scribe, founder and organizer of the Think Indigenous International Education Conference. - File Photo

maintained that the rest of the story and truth remains to be told.

Scribe raised the question: what was happening to the adults as the children were taken away? As generations of children were consigned to residential schools across the country, what were the stories of the families left behind? As examples, some unfortunate legacies of this shared history include the implementation of a pass system, the use of food shortages and food distribution to limit and control, the implementation of the *Indian Act* and other measures keeping First Nations people on reserve and under control.

According to Scribe, while the measures were primarily aimed at adults and were used to support compliance to the residential school system, they had devastating

impacts on the entire Indigenous community. Further, and most important to fully understanding the continued impact of residential schools, including its accompanying legislation and practices on Indigenous culture, families and overall ways of life today, the complete truth must be told.

He indicated the complete truth must become part of both education systems and our shared discourse as Canadians. On a final note, Scribe challenged all in attendance to continue the work of ensuring that the stories are told and the complete truth is taught to children, youth and adults across our communities today.

The rest of the 2020 conference reinforced the importance of including Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous education in all areas of education.

The first evening began with a screening of *We Will Stand Up*, a film focusing on the Boushie family as the trial unfolded and their subsequent quest for justice.

The breakout sessions continued on Day Two and focused on a wide range of topics including trauma-informed teaching, the importance of language and the value of Indigenous research methods in academic work.

Unfortunately, the threat of COVID-19 loomed for all three days of the conference with the Red Talks held on the final day being available only through live streaming. However, for me, the highlight of the conference was the unexpected keynote, generously offered by Scribe, and his call for the teaching of the complete truth on our path to reconciliation in Canada. n

Beck openly expresses concern over fate of more vulnerable students without connectivity

Saskatchewan NDP Education Critic Carla Beck was recently expressing her concern about the "digital divide" in these times of students having to adapt their learning to online, at-home delivery.

"Teachers know their own students and their situations, and if that connection is lost for six months and they don't have access to check in, there is real cause for concern."

Carla Beck

While calling on the provincial government to work with stakeholders to close the gap, which in fact is just part of what she sees as worrisome when it comes to the cutbacks to education spending in recent years. She said it's

only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that in all likelihood will only widen the chasm between the haves and have-nots in the province.

"The greatest equalizer we have in society is education, and the gap is only going to increase in the future. This situation we find ourselves in is an illustration of how important it is to have publicly delivered public education. It is one of the best ways in which we can at least buffer the edges.

"School fulfils so many functions that are not always recognized or even able to be measured because there's a lot of grey in the whole education experience for our students," Beck stressed.

Calling for the province to work with school divisions and teachers to ensure that every school has a technology equity plan and resources available, Beck maintained that when it comes to addressing some of the technology voids some students may be experiencing, it may not be purposeful.



Carla Beck, Saskatchewan NDP Education Critic

"I'm not suggesting this is as a result of any kind of malice; it's just not being aware of the reality that some students and families find themselves in. I would say 99 percent of the people making these sorts of decisions are simply

unaware of the situation. Either way, the result is the same for the kids though," she said.

Beck added that the main contributing factors are that some families in rural or remote areas have limited access to high-speed internet and there is also the socio-economic reality. Too often, Beck offered, the two intersect making the situation even more intolerable for some of those who find themselves marginalized to a large extent.

A registered social worker prior to entering politics, Beck has two decades of experience and acknowledged that the current situation causes her considerable angst.

"I legitimately fear for what the lack of connectivity with their peers and contact with their teachers might do to some of these kids. It's not just the learning lessons or not meeting the outcomes that concerns me; it's more about who has eyes on these children. So I worry very much about these kids

slipping under the radar. I know a lot of teachers are legitimately scared for their students.

"These are kids who need extra attention and resources, and I worry about those kids not having the relationship with their teacher and their peers. Teachers know their own students and their situations, and if that connection is lost for six months and they don't have access to check in, there is real cause for concern," she added.

Beck referred to the current situation where schools are all but certain to be closed until early September, meaning the "summer slide" will be multiplied by three in terms of length. She can't help but wonder what will emerge at the end of that time.

"I'm not naively optimistic, but I am hopeful that maybe this will cause all of us to sit back and really look at the equity situation. Perhaps somehow this can lead to something different and maybe better," she mused. n

STF Professional Learning has to accelerate its vision for expanding online component

While already an invaluable resource for teachers in the province, the general pandemonium, which came about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, has only further accentuated the important role of Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Professional Learning (formerly the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit).

Not only is STF Professional Learning providing much-needed online resources, but also of equal importance, they are giving teachers a chance to connect, albeit online as opposed to in person.

According to Shaun McEachern, director of STF Professional Learning, as many as 557 teachers tried to sign up for the first webinar after schools were closed. Due to technological limitations in staging such an event (there was a 500-person capacity), and concerns over the security issues recently arisen with Zoom, 309 participants ultimately wound up being enrolled.

Nevertheless, McEachern said that it has been a crazy time, even for those who are as well-versed in the use of technology as STF Professional Learning.

"It's a big change for us too and there are a lot of people tugging at us. Teachers are reaching out at a time like this, and I'm pretty pleased with how our team has been able to respond to those needs," he said.

According to McEachern, after each of the first three webinars the feedback was "overwhelmingly positive. That's what drives us in terms of where we go next and how we fulfil the needs of the teaching community. It's so important that we are able to reach out and support educators."

McEachern noted teachers have a lot of questions for him and his colleagues in terms of more fully integrating technology into their daily teaching routine.

"We've had a lot of conversations about how does assessment look in this environment as opposed to the actual physical classroom."

Until quite recently, McEachern was a principal in Saskatoon Public Schools and so he fully understands some of the unease teachers might feel. He indicated that he keeps in contact with former colleagues via playing hockey and other opportunities that arise. He said it is vital for teachers to have that ability to share and exchange ideas; it is as important in the online digital world as in person.

"One of our webinars was around leadership, and it was great to see how people jumped in and shared ideas not just about what they are doing but asking questions of colleagues in other school divisions. That's building community," he suggested.

McEachern cited an online panel that had been particularly successful in terms of not only generating and sharing ideas, but also increasing teachers' comfort level and knowledge base in this new world.

Contemplating for a moment the challenges that lie ahead, McEachern expressed his gratitude of having hired Jay Salikin to join STF Professional Learning given the technological expertise he brings to the team.

McEachern was also eager to point to the increased partnerships his team has developed in recent months, and never have the benefits been more apparent than now.

"We've worked hard to establish some of those



Shaun McEachern, Director of STF Professional Learning

partnerships and we're using them a lot when it comes to remote learning. There's a lot to consider at a time like this, and our partners have been a big help in the whole area of mental health and wellness for teachers."

Ironically, McEachern indicated that STF Professional Learning has always had a goal to enhance the asynchronous aspect of delivery, which would allow those utilizing the service to learn at different times during the day.

"It's definitely where we were headed and we want to offer both in-person facilitations (in which the ever-burgeoning Provincial Facilitators Community has played a key role) and the online component. This has just sped things up exponentially for us," he chuckled.

As another perspective from his own orbit, McEachern noted his son, who is in Grade 10 and is strong academically, said after his first online lesson, "it's not the same [as being in school] but it's definitely better than nothing."

As McEachern sees it, being able to offer both options in the future means STF Professional Learning will be quicker in responding to teachers' needs. n

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP



Leadership credibility in incredible times

By Jane Macleod, Senior Manager, Research and Records

Of the many factors that facilitate the leader and staff member relationship, credibility stands out as significant. Leadership development experts Kouzes and Posner assert, "Leadership is in the eye of the beholder." In other words, successful leadership is just as much about what followers perceive as it is about what the leader does.

A recent blog from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology portrays leaders with credibility as those who can lead their staff through "uncertainty, volatility and transformation." Without question, these are uncertain and transformative times. Whereas previously in schools, teachers and other staff members took their cue from observations of the leader's everyday actions and interactions. Today's context of remote learning creates challenges for school principals as they work to build and maintain credibility as an instructional leader.

Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey have written extensively about educational leadership and teacher education. They collaborate with Dominique Smith, a San Diego school administrator, and share four major components of credibility, which apply as equally to the teacher/student learning relationship as they do to the principal/teacher professional relationship.

Whether in a physical space or an online/remote learning atmosphere, the authors contend that establishing and maintaining credibility involves trust, competence, dynamism and immediacy. Let's look at what these four might look like for school principals across Saskatchewan today.

- **Trust.** As well as wanting honest answers, teachers today are relying on principals to help them understand their unfamiliar role of remote educator amidst tumultuous times. For example, they will look to the principal to clarify and contextualize Ministry expectations. Teachers will look for consistent messaging to families, students and communities and they will trust in their principal's voice in regards to their professional capacity and commitment to meet students' learning needs. Teachers look to their principals for honesty and integrity.

- **Expertise.** Perhaps more than ever, teachers today will look to their principal to improve their ability in using new platforms and/or technologies to support student learning as well as their own professional learning. Although principals may not have all the technological answers, teachers will expect them to continue to ask curriculum- and pedagogical-related questions, including learning about teachers' challenges and concerns regarding student engagement and learning. Teachers look to the principal for expertise.

- **Dynamism.** When uncertainty consumes the spirit, people look to their leader to offer a sense of optimism and inspiration. Whether through email, text messages or Zoom meetings, teachers will continue to hang on to signals of the principal's energy, passion and genuine interest in people and the topic at hand, as well as communicating forward-thinking ideas and possibilities for the future. Teachers look to their principals to sustain hope.

- **Immediacy.** Communication is much more than the exchange of words. Some say that nonverbal communication accounts for 60 to 70 percent of the interaction. Without question, communication is more difficult when we are not picking up those subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) facial and hand gestures or physical shifts. However, teachers will still look to the principal for reassurance that their contribution matters and that they are valued professionals. Teachers look to their principals for reassurance.

Leadership credibility is important, regardless of context. In their book, *Credibility*, Kouzes and Posner (2011) contend that credibility is the first law of leadership and they state, "If you don't believe in the messenger you won't believe the message."

Unquestionably, working in isolation presents numerous challenges to principals as they build and maintain credibility with their staff. However, it may be that when teachers are working hard, learning and adjusting to a new and challenging teaching reality, that is the time when teachers most need to perceive their principal's trust, expertise, passion and presence. And that's credibility at its best. n

Different, but the same

As schools throughout the province remain closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the messages outside this series of Saskatoon schools might be different, but there is no doubting that there is a unanimous message for students, parents and the public to remain vigilant through these uncertain times while also underlying the hope that schools will once again welcome students in their facilities in the early fall.



