

Education Sector Planning

Teacher Engagement With the Ministry of Education

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation
Interim Report – February 2014



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Introduction

In January 2014, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation hosted a series of meetings across the province between teachers and senior leaders in the Government of Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. The meetings were a forum for the Deputy Minister, and others, to learn about the professional working lives of teachers. Teachers were randomly selected to participate and there were between eight and 16 teachers present at each meeting.

All of the meetings were facilitated by Tish Karpa and/or Ian Krips, senior administrative staff with the Federation. The Ministry was represented variously by: Deputy Minister of Education Dan Florizone; Assistant Deputy Minister of Education Greg Miller; Executive Director of Student Achievement and Supports Tim Caleval; Executive Director of Early Years Lynn Allen; and, Executive Director of the Provincial Library and Literacy Office Brett Waytuck. Directors and school board members also attended each of the meetings in an observational role.

Detailed notes were taken at each meeting and submissions from teachers were received subsequently. Although not audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, the teacher quotes included herein were carefully noted at the time of the meeting. The scribed notes were examined and themed for each session. The notes and submissions provide a very rich and deep source of information reflecting the complexities inherent in teaching and learning.

After a careful review, seven themes have emerged from these meetings:

1. Professional Voice
2. Passion and Commitment
3. Professional Role of the Teacher
4. Increasing Diversity and Beneficial Change
5. Assessment
6. Teacher-Student Relationships
7. Authenticity of Student Learning

Cutting across the seven themes were recurring references to time, resources and supports for teaching and learning. Overall, it was abundantly obvious that student success is directly related to teacher agency. Teachers are dedicated professionals who passionately seek to improve the lives of students through the creation of an engaging, authentic and effective learning environment.

Listening to Teachers: A Summary of the Themes

1. Professional Voice

Throughout the meetings teachers were very open, direct and respectful. They had given considerable thought to the topics on the agenda prior to arriving. Many came with prepared notes and had consulted with colleagues. Teachers were pleased with the opportunity to speak directly to the Deputy Minister, which they described as a “hopeful” experience.

It was emphasized, however, that the dialogue must be ongoing and that teachers must see a concrete response from the Ministry as evidence that their professional voice has been heard, “otherwise it is just talk.” As one teacher put it:

“How or where are teachers going to be inserted into the decision-making processes? The things that work, how will they become broader policy? What are the unintended consequences [of various initiatives]? The system needs to be getting feedback directly from teachers, the government needs to be acting on it, and then coming back and checking with us again.”

Teachers are vested in the system. The system will not function as efficiently and effectively as is possible until teachers, with their knowledge, skills and experience, are fully included in educational decision-making as trusted and respected professionals. Teachers believe strongly, however, that their voice is currently not being heard.

“I surveyed the teachers in my school about how well they felt their professional voice has been heard. On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being perfect, everyone’s score was under five.”

A concern was particularly evident about the lack of teacher voice beyond the school.

“Teachers and principals are on the front lines; we know what is going on, [and] we have ideas about how things can be improved. We want our voices heard [and] we want to be included in the decision-making processes. Right now I feel that I am heard within the school ... but not outside of it.”

“A major lesson should be improving teacher voice and professional autonomy. For example, yes, we share the goal of increasing graduation rates. But the related initiatives are not implemented in a way that is supportive of teachers and that will work for ... students. Our feedback needs to be heard and acted upon. None of us have had the opportunity to speak to the Ministry in the past. To be heard. It can go a long way to improving the health of teachers and the system.”

Teachers repeatedly referenced less than ideal implementation of new policy and initiatives. It was not that the research or the intent was unsound, but that often there have been unintended consequences during the implementation phase. A more careful consideration of the frequency, scope and implications of new initiatives through a genuine collaboration with teachers will lead to greater teacher and student success.

Teachers were clear that their professional voice and autonomy must be respected throughout all levels of the system (i.e., government, division, board, school, parental, community).

2. Passion and Commitment

As often noted in the Deputy Minister's closing comments, the passion of teachers and their commitment to students clearly emerged in the meetings. As he said, "it is not you that doesn't put students first, it is the system." Unfortunately, this extreme dedication of teachers to students results in actions that detract from the professional core of teaching.

For example, teachers spoke often about becoming increasingly responsible for creating the conditions for learning by feeding students, counselling students, managing student behaviour or acting as an administrative "paper mover" on students' behalf.

"There's that old adage, it takes a village to raise a child. But we've become the village [and] everyone else is vacationing around it."

"Teachers are wearing lots of hats. Social worker, counsellor, others. We can flag potential issues but often we are ignored ... so we do our best to fill the gap."

"As a principal, you do the best you can ... Are we being effective? I don't know. Safety comes first, then putting out 'fires.' It is a triage situation."

Relatedly, teachers cited the lack of time built into the system for preparation, assessment, professional development and collaboration. This results in teachers dedicating many hours in the evenings and on the weekends to building a learning environment necessary for teacher and student success.

"We need time to prepare and to think before new initiatives are rolled out. We need to feel like we've had the literature and the training that is necessary and that we've been able to figure out how to make it work in our particular situation."

"In a perfect world, I would have more planning time ... the more planning, the better my day. There needs to be time for both planning on my own and collaborative planning."

"We need time for planning for each child. Sometimes we need multiple plans for each lesson."

"Now, what little planning time we have – two days per year – is spent on assessment."

Heavy extracurricular and other demands also compete for teachers' time in the evenings and on the weekends.

"Extracurricular can lead to guilt. Sometimes the extracurricular causes more stress than the job itself. Sometimes extracurricular is a big part of hiring, rather than a focus on classroom abilities. We need to consider that there is different availability at different stages of life. Maybe, with a young family, I am not as available for extracurricular. Young teachers want to do it all, won't say no, but can't do it all – they burn out."

Teachers are passionate about their professional work and extremely committed to their students' learning.

"Prep and marking is four hours per night, plus weekends, plus holidays, plus summer. The 197 school days or equivalent would be an absolute dream."

3. Professional Role of the Teacher

Under the current system the substantial amount of teacher work in the evenings, on the weekends and during holidays is assumed, unacknowledged and unavoidable. There is serious concern about the competing demands of professional and personal commitments negatively impacting the health of teachers and their families. Furthermore, teachers are concerned about the amount of time they currently spend on activities that are not closely related to the core of teaching and learning.

“There is no choice in our work. Other professionals say ‘I have work to do on the weekend too’ – but the difference is that I can’t reprioritize on Monday. I have students there, all the time. And if I don’t do the prep on the weekend, then it isn’t good for students – they get bored and behaviour problems arise.”

“We need to be really clear about the core functions of a school. What do we want teachers to be doing?”

In order to be freed to focus on the core of their professional practice, teachers clearly articulated a need to re-imagine the ways that parents, the community and other human services providers can contribute to the education system and the well-being of children and youth.

“Ideally, I would be just teaching. Not the nurse and the doctor and the social worker. My students would be there, ready to learn, able to leave their baggage at the door. Right now, they come pretty loaded, whether it is no breakfast, parental issues ... school is last on their list.”

“If we could get support for ensuring the students get to school. Often they don’t have learning issues and can do so well when they are there. And very responsive teams that include other professionals when needed.”

“I would love to see more of a community centre with a school attached. A pool, nurses, police, having all the resources together Bring the community to the student!”

This tension between the core and the periphery of teaching practice needs to be clarified and the professional role of the teacher supported by redefining the roles and responsibilities of other professionals and society in supporting student readiness to learn.

Teachers identified this clarification of roles and responsibilities as a critical piece for being empowered to meet current and future students’ needs for an authentic and engaging educational experience.

“There needs to be a view toward empowering teachers, defining our purpose, and looking at what authentic learning really is. A re-imagining of the conception of school.”

4. Increasing Diversity and Beneficial Change

Teachers noted that society is changing rapidly and it is accompanied by increasing diversity among students as well as by increasingly diverse school needs.

“The dynamic of school has changed so much. You can’t have blanket rules because the diversity is so great. Now we have intentional non-learners.”

“I have a student with severe behavioural and other difficulties. He is very violent. I’ve experienced success recently because I’ve gone an entire month without being hit or punched once.”

“We need to remember that there are [differing] local needs. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work.”

Teachers recognize the need for change to respond to evolving societal conditions and expectations, but it has to be change that is beneficial for students. Teachers observed that there have been too many “top-down” initiatives over the last few years and most have not benefited students.

At one meeting teachers provided a list of over 24 initiatives that have impacted their professional work over the past three years. Teachers were initially unsure whether these initiatives originated in the Ministry or at the division office. However, regardless of their source, teachers were clear that the number of initiatives needs to be reduced, they need more time with previous initiatives to ensure they are working as intended, and consideration must be given to “taking things off the plate” rather than always adding to it.

“We are constantly bombarded with forms to be filled out, more initiatives—there is too much change. There is not enough time with the last initiative to get it working well before the next one comes.”

“There is no process for stopping what isn’t working ... [I can’t] say ‘no’ to something or ... say something isn’t working ... We are afraid to say no or speak up, to stop doing something that [isn’t working], afraid that we’ll get punished.”

Teachers explained that a few initiatives have turned out well and led to improved student learning. These positive initiatives tended to come with time, resources and supports that freed teachers to focus on the core of teaching and work more closely with students.

“There are too many initiatives! But a couple of these have been really valuable. For example, the RtL [Response to Learning]. I get to work with the students that I know need the extra work. So, time-tabled RtL was key to student success.”

Teachers believe that for change to be beneficial it will support their professional autonomy, be reflective of their professional voice, and create more flexibility in the system for teaching and learning. Teachers communicated a need for the system to incorporate more flexible learning opportunities, a variety of pathways and timelines for learning, and a rapid response from an appropriate team of professionals when teachers identify concerns about student needs. Ideally, teachers would like to see a greater presence of other professionals in the classroom and the school.

“In an ideal world, we would be respected as professionals. There wouldn’t be a top-heavy approach. The Ministry wouldn’t just, like with the school hours, say: ‘Boom, this is the way it is going to be.’ They’d check with us, listen to us, and respond to us.”

“There is a need to look at our model. We can no longer sustain the current model and continue to just move students forward.”

Teachers provided numerous examples of ideas for policy and program changes that are responsive to students' needs. For example:

"Credit recovery is a life-changing initiative. [The students work on] the outcomes that they didn't earn. The credit recovery teacher is with them and the earlier teacher reviews when the assignments are completed."

"There needs to be a multi-modal, interdepartmental approach to supporting student needs."

Fundamentally, however, it was emphasized that there needs to be additional resources in terms of professionals and paraprofessionals that are directly supporting teachers in their work.

Another example given of ensuring change leads to student and teacher success was related to curricula. Teachers spoke passionately about the changes that they've seen in curriculum documents over the years. They noted that the recent documents are little more than a set of outcomes and indicators. In most cases it was not the outcomes and indicators that teachers found problematic – often the new curriculum was spoken highly of – but they emphasized a need for a richer set of instructional resources to be included with a new curriculum.

"I am getting near the end of my career. I'm worrying about how I'm going to pilot and bring in all these new curricula into our school. I'm worried about how much work it is going to be and where I'll fit that in. But I'm really excited about the new curricula and how they fit the environment of Saskatchewan."

"[Teachers should] have rapid fire resources [available] for when you are in areas you are less comfortable with or where you are developing your practice."

It must be emphasized, however, that the challenges related to curricular resources are exacerbated for teaching and learning in French. The curricula tend to not be renewed as frequently and the search for appropriate French language resources can be very difficult. Often teachers resort to translating resources from English to French themselves, which is a significant additional draw on their time.

"We live in a minority environment as French speakers, so it is critical to have good resources in French as well as access to the same resources that others have. Often, we can find excellent English resources but they need to be translated. Then, there is the related multicultural nature of the French speaking community that adds another level."

"The curriculum guides in French need to be richer. They are bare bones. health and social studies, for example. Teachers are saying this for all the different grade levels. So we are all spending many hours on the Internet looking for resources."

"Our curricula [in French] are out of date. For example, law and financial management are currently offered without a curriculum."

A further related issue is the lack of specialized professionals that are fluent in French and can serve French speaking students' needs. For example, it is very difficult to access support from a speech language pathologist who provides French language services.

"Ideally, there'd be diagnostic services if we suspect an issue, not having to wait three to four years. There'd be continued work, regularly, in the schools with the students after the initial services ... There needs to be more help for students with special needs in French."

Teachers noted that a new curriculum should be piloted and implemented with sufficient time for professional development and planning activities, and the remainder of the curricular stream must be released in a timely fashion so that learning is not negatively affected by forcing students to jump between new and old curricula.

5. Assessment

Assessment initiatives and strategies was a theme that generated much discussion. The need to measure and report was acknowledged by teachers, but there was significant concern with the trend of increased frequency, the time it takes away from classroom instruction and the harmful effects of inappropriate assessment strategies on students.

“I would like to have less paperwork and data entry. I am invited by students to participate in various activities but now I have to say: ‘sorry, I can’t, I have to enter data and do my prep.’ It is opposite to why I got into the profession. The values are lost.”

“Fountas and Pinell was relatively easy with secondary students. But it takes half an hour or an hour to do it with each student in elementary. Teachers are doing it at lunch, after school, in the evenings. That’s not right. [At least] bring in a substitute teacher during the testing periods.”

In addition to taking teachers away from classroom instruction, there were serious concerns about the appropriateness of most new assessment initiatives. For example, they often fail to align with the curriculum, are not supportive of differentiated learning, measure achievement rather than growth in learning, are not necessarily given at appropriate times in students’ learning cycles and tend to not provide timely feedback to benefit student learning.

“There are bigger successes than just getting a score on a test. Some students with serious difficulties, behavioural and others, we’ve moved them forward. They are now not being violent, they are more socially capable, and starting to engage. That’s a huge benefit to society. But it isn’t recognized by the system or valued.”

“We feel that student success cannot always be measured by a test. We are expected to differentiate instruction for every student, then give them all the same test. They’ve grown so much and are doing so well – then we give them a test that isn’t appropriate to their learning and it totally demotivates them.”

Teachers said that data gathering and measurement has to have a clear purpose and be useful for teachers. It has to be gathered strategically and be directly beneficial to teaching and learning.

“Data and measurement can be useful but it has to be purposeful. We have a ton of data, but it is not in one place. We have to go all over the place to get it, and then build spreadsheets. I don’t mind assessment but it has to be done in an appropriate way.”

“How do these data sets talk to each other? How do they paint a complete picture of the whole child?”

In order for data and measurement to be beneficial for students, it has to be easily accessible (i.e., transparent) for teachers and easily acquired (i.e., efficient). As the Deputy Minister repeatedly noted, “the best measurement isn’t something you’d notice.”

Teachers identified that there is an abundance of data already in the system and made it very clear that not only are they noticing data collection, but it is also overwhelming everything else.

Teachers believe that the system should make better use of the data, processes and routines that currently exist. Further, they expect efforts to be made to reduce the time teachers now must dedicate to assessment, data entry and reporting. It also must be noted that the significant recent changes in assessment demands have resulted in strong feelings among teachers that they are not trusted. There is a balance here that needs to be restored.

6. Student-Teacher Relationships

The theme of student-teacher relationships that emerged from the meetings directly relates to the passion and commitment of teachers as professionals. The importance of focusing on the whole child and developing teacher-student relationships was a strong undercurrent throughout. It is seen as critical in order to both help students who are falling through the cracks in the system and to help all other students grow.

“When I first became a teacher, I was always out at recess, playing with the kids, being with the kids, developing relationships with them. You can’t teach a kid unless you are developing a relationship. But now my time is increasingly being spent entering data at recess and lunch rather than where it belongs – with the kids.”

“It is difficult to get to know my students now, which I need to do to know how to adapt and approach the curriculum with them.”

“The class size needs to be small enough to have the relationship between teachers and students that is needed.”

Many of the successes that teachers shared at the outset of each meeting centred on building strong relationships with students. For example:

“I am in my third year of teaching a Grade 5 and 6 split class. A big success this year is less pedagogical and more the building of relationships. Students are now coming to me for help with a variety of academic and social issues and I feel better able to help.”

“I think celebrating the students you have in front of you is the biggest success. I had a Grade 9 student who was very timid and wouldn’t speak in front of people. This year I’ve been able to develop a relationship with him and I was able to get him up on stage. Now he is coming to me and sharing his ideas about what we should do for the next play.”

Teachers are worried about systemic actions, such as inappropriate testing, the inability to leverage support services or the lack of program flexibility that damage these relationships.

“This is the first time in two years that we’ve had a special ed. or resource teacher. We’ve had great success with intensive diagnostics in grades 2 and 3 to quickly identify the difficulties some students are having. This has led to wonderful success in working with those students to improve their reading. I know, though, that many schools are not so fortunate.”

“One of the highest priorities to address is the challenges associated with special education supports. We have a student that just transferred. He is 13 and we know he is on the autism spectrum. He is being tested now for the first time. There needs to be access to special education and other supports across the province – when teachers think a student needs it.”

Time, resources and supports for teaching and learning were identified as critical factors related to the development of student-teacher relationships and growth in learning. Teachers cautioned, however, that:

“Any support I have to prepare for isn’t a support.”

7. Authenticity of Learning

Teachers expressed a concern about ensuring that learning is put first. Teachers understand that establishing the conditions for learning, being free to focus on their core professional duties, and participating in other peripheral activities are interrelated components that contribute to student success. Teachers are dedicated to students and know that developing individual relationships helps them to facilitate authentic student learning and enjoy teaching success.

“By focusing on just graduation rates, we are actually lowering expectations for students. [It becomes] ‘What can we do to get them a 50?’ rather than asking: ‘What do they want to learn? What do they need to learn? How can we best help them to grow in their learning?’”

“We need time to take students out of class, to work with them individually.”

“We can encourage student learning ... We want to encourage students to meet their potential.”

“There is a need ... to develop understanding that school is about learning first, not grades.”

“I wonder if we could remove those boxes – Grade 1, Grade 2 – letting learning happen when students are ready. Who says it all has to happen in 12 years?”

The last word, nicely crossing all of the themes we heard, goes to an elementary physical education teacher:

“There is external pressure for all the paperwork, for data mining, to focus on reading, then math. OK, I get it. But when is it health and phys. ed.? When is having healthy students in schools the priority? How are the priorities set?”

Bringing Together the Themes

This series of meetings included discussions with more than 200 teachers in Saskatchewan's PreK-12 public education system. The breadth and depth of the information, expert opinions and experiences provided was substantial. Moreover, the design of the meetings allowed the facilitators to probe and, through conversation, effectively draw out richer details from participants than otherwise are generally captured in more traditional open-ended responses such as those found on survey questionnaires.

The seven themes that emerged from these meetings are consistent with the themes found in recent research related to the professional work lives and experiences of Saskatchewan teachers.

For example, the Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit's teacher time study (2013) conducted on behalf of the Federation identified three themes: teachers' commitment to and concern for education; barriers to teacher and student success; and compromises to teacher commitment to education.¹

These three themes included the topics of teacher professional autonomy and agency, commitment to students and student learning, rapid and extensive changes in society and education, increased accountability demands, decreased supports for student learning, and the negative impacts of work intensification and lack of professional voice on teachers and, through them, their students (p. 3).

Similarly, a report by Martin, Dolmage and Sharpe (2012) found that Saskatchewan teachers "were dedicated to their work, absorbed by it, and committed to the ongoing success of their respective schools" (p. 27).² At the same time, there were concerns around "the difficulties that teachers had in managing formidable workloads, mounting expectations and responsibilities, and a variety of other work-related stressors" (p. 27). This combination of factors was found to negatively impact the health of teachers and, through them, the learning environment for students.

The themes that have emerged at these recent meetings and in these two studies all have three things in common: time, resources and supports. Taken together, these three common items currently undermine teachers' professional identity, agency and sense of trust. Trust is foundational to teacher and student success. It is compromised when the professional voices of teachers go unheard, are not formally included in decision-making activities, or are otherwise silenced.

Time is clearly essential to teacher success and was consistently identified by teachers as a high-priority item for the Ministry to hear. Teachers are experiencing an erosion of their instructional time by peripheral activities and demands. They want to be freed to focus on the professional core of teaching.

Related to focusing on the core of teaching is the need for regular scheduled time in the day and throughout the year for professional development, planning, assessment and collaboration.

¹ Saskatchewan Instructional Development Research Unit [SIDRU]. (2013, December). *Teacher time: A study of the challenges of intensification of Saskatchewan teachers' professional time*. Saskatoon, SK, Canada: Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

² Martin, R. R., Dolmage, W. R., & Sharpe, D. (2012, February). *Seeking wellness: Descriptive findings from the survey of the work life and health of teachers in Regina and Saskatoon*. Saskatoon, SK, Canada: Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Research funding provided by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation.

Teachers need to collaborate with their colleagues at the local, division and provincial levels in order to plan an instructional program that best meets students' needs. They also need time for individual planning, reflection and research as well as to be able to seek out professional development that is relevant to their particular practice.

Resources were another high priority that teachers wanted the Ministry to take away from the meetings. This encompassed human resources, physical resources, technological resources and curricular resources. Teachers expressed that the current system is not providing nearly enough in the way of other professional and paraprofessional human resources to meet the now very diverse needs of students.

Further, what is being provided takes far too much administrative effort by teachers before it is delivered, is not provided in a timely enough manner and does not have adequate followup with regular return visits by the same external professionals. The lack of physical space that is conducive to active, engaging, and authentic teaching and learning environments was also consistently mentioned. Deteriorating facilities, including leaking roofs or poor heating and plumbing were mentioned on multiple occasions.

Teachers consistently stated that students should have access on demand to pedagogically appropriate technology that works dependably. They also expressed that changes to curriculum, while potentially positive, need to come with more "rapid-fire, classroom ready resources" and time for teachers to prepare for its implementation. Teachers repeatedly referenced earlier curriculum processes that included teachers in the development, piloting and delivery of professional development for new curricula.

Supports for students to be ready to learn are clearly a significant concern for teachers. Ultimately, it is recognition that a new compact between the education sector and the surrounding community, including but not limited to parents, is necessary for the learning and the well-being of students. Teachers do not operate in a vacuum within the walls of a school. As one teacher put it, "other human service providers see people at their discretion, whereas we see everyone every day."

In order for teachers to focus on the core of their professional duties, conditions for learning must be met. Basic needs of students that include nutrition, safety, medical, and other social or community services must be ensured. From listening to teachers it is clear that balance needs to be restored in the professional work lives of teachers. This, in part, hinges on society placing a high value on education again, albeit in new and innovative ways.

Conclusion

To complete this summary report, the Federation comes back to the obvious: teacher success and student success is interrelated.

At the start of each meeting, teachers shared powerful stories and took great pleasure in students' successes over the past year. If there is a desire for changes to the educational system that improve students' experiences and outcomes, then the link between teacher success and student success must be firmly acknowledged and placed at the centre of change efforts.

Focusing meaningfully on the link between student and teacher success requires deepening the understanding of teachers as professionals. This means a serious commitment to respecting, seeking out, including and responding to teachers' professional voices – at all levels of the system.

Finally, teachers were adamant that they did not want their experiences and observations of the education system to be read as a litany of complaints. Teachers frequently and passionately communicated a love for their jobs and that they take great satisfaction from working with students. They see teaching as a profession of relationships.

Teachers, throughout the meetings, did not lay blame and did not want to abandon the nature of the relationships that compel their actions towards improving conditions for learning and that bring joy from extracurricular activities. They found it important, however, to paint as robust a picture as possible of the current state of educational affairs in order that future change might contribute as much as possible to student and teaching success.

Teaching has changed.

Our understanding of students' needs has changed.

The link between teaching success and student success has not.

Appendix A

STF/Ministry Meetings With Teachers: Sector Planning Agenda

Introduction

The focus of our meeting will be on the professional practice of teachers – specifically, teachers’ aspirations, vision for publicly funded education and the barriers encountered as teachers strive to best serve their students and communities. The information you will provide is a component of the STF’s member engagement process examining the professional life of teachers.

The information gathered will also be used to inform the Ministry’s sector planning process.

Introductions

Please introduce yourself to the group by sharing your name, teaching assignment and one success you’ve had this year.

Norms

Please see the attached norms.

Process

In preparation for the discussion, please reflect on the following questions.

1. Vision

If you woke up tomorrow and conditions for students and teachers were in an ideal state:

- What would you be doing?
- What would your students be doing?
- How would you and your students be supported?
- Describe your relationships with students, parents, colleagues and local/central administration.
- How might your answers to the above inform a vision for publicly funded education?
- What key ideas would be essential?

2. Professional Aspirations in the Context of Current Conditions

Consider your current teaching assignment, all of the school, division and Ministry initiatives you’ve participated in over the past three years (bring a number or list if you can) and factor in the needs of the community in which you teach.

- What comes to mind for you when you contrast your vision with your current state?
- What alignments do you see? What conflicts and/or tensions are you identifying?
- How important do you feel your voice is in the current context? Why should your voice matter?

3. Challenges

As you think about all of the school, division and Ministry initiatives you've participated in over the past three years, which of these has made a really significant difference for your students?

- Which of your students' needs remain unmet? What are your hunches regarding this?
- What would you need to experience to know that the sector plan is having a positive effect on teaching and learning?

4. Conclusion

Given your expertise and given that you are responsible for improving education:

- What are three to five critical things that need to be attended to?

5. Feedback

- What have we missed?
- What else do you need to share?

6. Summary by Ministry Officials

Ministry officials will conclude the meeting by summarizing what they have heard.

Norms of Collaboration

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1. Promoting a Spirit of Inquiry

Exploring perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and interpretations promotes the development of understanding. Inquiring into the ideas of others before advocating for one's own ideas is important to productive dialogue and discussion.

2. Pausing

Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion and decision-making.

3. Probing

Probe or inquire to increase the clarity and precision of the group's thinking.

4. Putting Ideas on the Table

Ideas are the heart of meaningful dialogue and discussion. Label the intention of your comments. For example: "Here is one idea ..." or "One thought I have is ..." or "Here is a possible approach ..." or "Another consideration might be ...".

5. Paying Attention to Self and Others

Meaningful dialogue and discussion are facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others, and is aware of what (s)he is saying and how it is said as well as how others are responding.



Saskatoon – Head Office

2317 Arlington Avenue
Saskatoon SK S7J 2H8
T: 306-373-1660 or 1-800-667-7762
F: 306-374-1122
stf@stf.sk.ca

Regina – Appointments Only
Suite 375-3303 Hillside Street
Regina SK S4S 6W9

www.stf.sk.ca