

Guiding Principles for Collective Bargaining

There is a common purpose to our collective efforts – to maximize the opportunities for success for each and every student in our care.

Everything we do is designed to help students learn and be successful in school and in life.

Every employee in the education sector (FDK-12) is there because they have an unwavering commitment to this belief.

We have a lot to be proud of in Ontario. On international achievement measures of literacy, science and math, Ontario's students rank in the top five in the world. Across the province, school boards have made remarkable improvements in literacy and numeracy among elementary students; school graduation rates have risen considerably and more than 80% of our students are passing the Grade 10 literacy test. Our successful programs, strategies and assessments for learning approaches are a magnet for the world.

To build on this success, we must continue to strengthen the alignment of our purpose and consolidate all of our collective efforts to ensure a direct line of sight to the child in the classroom.

We are at a time where there has never been a greater understanding of the instructional strategies, classroom structures and supports that have the deepest impact on learning and student achievement. The research has shown and will continue to show a direct cause and effect relationship between student success and the precise and purposeful use by staff of instructional practices and transformational leadership approaches that are evidence-based. These practices are tried and true strategies; when they are used in a consistent way that also allows for differentiation to suit the circumstances, they powerfully change practice, behaviors and results over time. The level of every staff member's engagement and training in these processes and practices is a distinguishing feature in how successful a school or district can become.

We also know more about child and adolescent development than ever before. Learning environments must reflect this understanding and must adapt on an on-going basis to meet the needs of all students. Teaching and learning in a digital world, children and youth mental health, equity and inclusion, and safe and secure environments are all examples of factors that are growing in significance and that demand increased focus by educators. If we are to maximize student success these issues must be effectively implemented and integrated into classrooms and schools. This is a time when we need to

be intentional and adaptable to the changing needs of students and our communities; to create learning environments that are relevant, up to date, and responsive to student needs both now and as we move into the future.

Teaching 21st century learning skills will require us to think outside of our traditional classrooms and timetable structures and to keep current with the changing technology landscape. Children and youth mental health issues will require staff to be trained in mental health literacy and to work collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams with other staff such as mental health workers and public health nurses. Full day kindergarten has demonstrated the positive impact of support workers and teachers working as a team to support children and their learning. All of these areas herald change and growth and require professional development and training for staff. This cannot always be delivered within the instructional day.

The balance and respect of everyone's role is essential. The role of principal as instructional leader needs to be recognized and valued. Teachers and support staff as professionals need to be recognized and valued in the context of a team that includes the leadership of the principal and the district. We must have a collective understanding from every education professional and union that along with their role comes a set of responsibilities that needs to be coordinated as part of a comprehensive district strategic plan and school improvement planning process. These responsibilities need to be reflected through collective agreements that balance employee rights and working conditions with the conditions that promote student success.

Four Key Pillars

The ability to achieve student success requires a tenacious commitment to four key pillars:

- student engagement
- parent engagement
- staff engagement
- safe and nurturing school/learning environments.

These four pillars are closely aligned to the provincial government priorities of improving student achievement, increasing public confidence and reducing achievement gaps.

The description of these four pillars is based on the following assumptions:

- The workday of teachers and support staff is not the same as the student instructional day;
- The instructional time that students have with their designated teacher is to be maximized and therefore uninterrupted as much as possible;
- The principal is the key instructional leader who must coordinate, facilitate and support school improvement plans that are aligned to Board and Ministry goals;
- Parents are key stakeholders and time must be dedicated to their involvement in ways that include information sharing and joint planning for their child's success;
- Professional development and training is integral to building teacher, support staff and administrator capacity to effectively implement transformational practices;
- Current Education Act regulations are to be implemented as outlined and intended in the legislation.

Student Engagement

Recent research conducted by the Canadian Education Association reflects that student engagement is a combination of a number of key elements including social, academic and intellectual engagement. Throughout a student's educational career, the relationship to a teacher or support staff is essential in creating nurturing and productive learning environments where students feel safe, valued, respected and included. The greater the blocks of uninterrupted instructional time, the greater the opportunities for retention, engagement and improved student achievement.

Parent Engagement

The research is clear on the positive correlation between parent engagement and student achievement. We must make sure that parents are kept informed of student progress through regular communication with their child's teachers, and that they are provided time to exchange and share information regarding their child and to attend school events. In order to accommodate parent work schedules the timing of these meetings and events may vary throughout and beyond the student instructional day. This requires that teachers and classroom support staff participate in meetings at times that do not regularly take away from instructional time.

At the same time, parents are expected to be respectful when requesting access to school staff. Parent involvement must be seen as an integral part of the role and responsibility of teachers, support staff and administrators within and outside the instructional day.

Staff Engagement

Staff engagement is not just another key pillar but connects all of the pillars in a strong and powerful structure. When staff are engaged they build capacity through professional development and training; they participate in school structures that promote professional dialogue and reflective practice; they help to align classrooms and instructional practice with the school improvement process/district strategic plan. These activities produce the necessary cohesion and synergy for improving student achievement.

Professional development and training that reaches the ultimate goal of improving student achievement occurs in a combination of ways. It is self-directed by individual staff, it is a collaboration by staff and school leadership, and it flows from directions set out by the Ministry and the Board. The various formats allow for networking across districts as well as professional dialogue among school teams. The result is distributed leadership and shared ownership for improving practice and enhancing student success. The principal co-ordinates, guides and supports the activities but it is driven by the work and commitment of the teaching and support staff.

As professionals everyone must expect that professional development will be done in a variety of ways and at varying times and that there will not be an over-reliance on any one method or time of offering. To be successful, professional development and training must be aligned to the school improvement plan and should occur at a variety of times including PA/PD days, staff meetings and after the student's instructional day. The fact that uninterrupted blocks of instructional time are a key element in contributing to improved student achievement means that the scheduling of professional development and training should not be done with any significant regularity during instructional time.

Safe and Nurturing School/Learning Environments

If a student does not feel safe, he or she cannot learn. All school staff have a role in making sure schools are safe, welcoming, nurturing, inclusive and respectful places to learn and work.

Teachers and support staff being vigilant in school hallways and welcoming students into classrooms should not constitute assigned supervision. It should be seen as a role expectation that leads to increased student engagement and school safety. This includes

dismissal time of students at the end of the student's instructional day where staff presence in a hallway can facilitate orderly dismissal, mitigate conflict and encourage positive student interaction. The presence and visibility of staff can dramatically impact the entire school environment.

Communities of Practice

To ensure students are supported to the greatest extent possible, schools need to be places in which staff work together to maximize student outcomes. This collaborative approach has evolved into communities of practice in schools where regular reviews of student performance and opportunities for staff dialogue lead to informed instructional decisions about what happens in classrooms. Creating and supporting this kind of structure in the school ensures that discussions are lively and purposeful and that there is increased professional learning. The key elements within a community of practice include shared norms and values, a collective sense of responsibility for student learning, collaboration, shared practice and reflective dialogue.

School staffs having these five elements see their work as a joint enterprise. Schools with an established collaborative culture are adaptive, their staff possess resiliency, and decisions are made based on a common vision and understanding of what is in the best interests of students.

Summary

Our guiding principles for collective bargaining support and strengthen a remarkable school system where all students achieve and where children come first. The four pillars of student success must be seamlessly integrated into the practices of our school boards, our schools and our classrooms to ensure the best possible learning environments for each and every student.