

# Curriculum Committee Annual Report

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## 2011-2012

### Committee members:

Nathan Orman – chair

Stéphane Richard

Brenda Zwicker

Cathy Doucet

Grant Frost

Joyce Lively

Tanya Sampson

Cindy MacKinnon – Provincial Executive liaison

Ron Brunton – NSTU staff liaison

### Proceedings

In accordance with normal procedure for NSTU standing committees, the NSTU Curriculum Committee met three times this year; on October 4, 2011, January 6, 2012, and March 23, 2012. The Committee has established the practice of inviting the Director of English Program Services to the first meeting for a discussion concerning specific topics raised by the Committee as well as for an overview of Department of Education directions for the year. The current Director, Ann Blackwood, attended accompanied by John Fahie who reviewed the status of the Student Information System and provided an overview of TIENET, the SIS module designed to track students on Individual Program Plans.

The conversation with Ms. Blackwood focused on curriculum support and she reiterated the Department's commitment to reduce the number of outcomes. She also provided information about the Early Literacy Framework, particularly emphasising the flexibility at the board and school level. In particular and in contrast with Reading Recovery, the literacy support teachers were provided on the basis of school need rather than school population.

The Committee also reviewed the CTF document *The Voice of Canadian Teachers on Teaching and Learning* and expressed the view that this document should be given as broad a distribution as possible.

The second meeting of the Curriculum Committee took place on January 6, 2012. The Committee received a presentation showing how well Nova Scotia students did on the Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and reviewed an article by Dr. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley *The Far Side of Educational Change*. The Committee recommends a broader distribution of this article for teachers.

The Committee also invited Mr. Jim Rice, Director of Evaluation Services for the Department of Education to attend in the afternoon. Mr. Rice emphasised that the Provincial large-scale assessment in Nova Scotia was strikingly different than what is done in other jurisdictions. All provincial assessments are designed in Nova Scotia with input from classroom teachers, are based on the appropriate Nova

Scotia curriculum and there is a significant effort to align with what is taught and assessed. He also noted that the assessments other than the NSE 12 examinations, provincial assessments are designed to identify students who may need additional support. The Department hopes these assessments can be used by teachers to either confirm their own classroom assessments or raise questions concerning students' learning when the two appear to differ. Mr. Rice stated that where there is a difference between the provincial assessment and the classroom assessments, he hope teachers are challenged to examine the student, their approaches and to try to determine what factors influence the difference: *"The power of data is in the questions they provoke."* He further stated that large-scale assessments should not define the curriculum, but should follow the curriculum.

Mr. Rice also discussed the Early Literacy Language Assessment (ELLA), particularly in light of the change to the Grade Primary entry age. The first cohort of these younger students is in Grade 3 this year and therefore is the first set of younger students to take the ELLA. He noted that while there were some additional questions of greater difficulty to facilitate better differentiation, there are some anchor questions so that cohorts can be compared year to year. This year the results were comparable to last year. In addition, while younger students performed slightly below older students, there was considerable variation among boards and in one board the younger students did better than the older students.

The final meeting of the Curriculum Committee took place on March 23, 2012. The Committee had three major items on the agenda for this meeting. The first task was to review the resolutions for Council 2012 the Resolutions Committee had directed to the Curriculum Committee for review and possible comment.

In the morning, Ann Blackwood, accompanied by Donna Karsten, Mathematics Curriculum Consultant for the Department of Education, joined the committee to provide an overview of the new mathematics curriculum and the supporting resources for teachers. The new curriculum will be introduced for grades P-3 and Grade 10 in September 2013. The curriculum will be introduced for grades 4-6 and Grade 11 in the 2014-15 school year and the following year introduce the new curriculum for grades 7-9 and Grade 12. The new curriculum will also reflect a significant reduction in outcomes. Currently there are 382 outcomes in mathematics P-6. The new curriculum will have 153. Accompanying the new curriculum, the Department is developing an on-line resource that will allow teachers to search, sort and organize by GCO, topic and grade. There will be a yearly plan to assist teachers in understanding the logical order of topics and provide for greater consistency among schools.

Ms. Blackwood noted that the Department recognized the need for extensive professional development opportunities will be needed for principals and teachers.

In the afternoon, Don Glover, Director of Student Services with the Department joined the Committee. He reviewed the new SIS module TIENET and based on his explanation, most committee members believe this will reduce the paperwork load on teachers who are trying to address the learning needs of students engaged in the program planning process. He acknowledged that support for students with

special needs, whether from the Department of Education or at the classroom level, faces additional challenges due to the cuts to funding.

Finally, the Curriculum Committee would like to make the following recommendations to the Provincial Executive.

## Recommendations

1. That following Annual Council, the Curriculum Committee prioritized the adopted curriculum resolutions asking the NSTU to lobby the Department and provide the prioritized list to the Provincial Executive prior to submitting the resolutions to the Department for response.
  - a. Rationale: when we send ten or twenty resolutions to the Department of Education requesting action, it is unreasonable to expect action on all. We need to provide focus to what we really want them to do.
  - b. This would probably require an additional meeting following Annual Council.
2. That the Provincial Executive develop a communication channel so that members' curriculum concerns can be directed to Local leadership and the Provincial Executive member which can subsequently be directed to the Curriculum Committee to see whether the issue can be more directly addressed (rather than just a resolution to Council). This would involve increasing the awareness of the function of the Curriculum Committee (and others?). There would also need to be a mechanism to return the information to the member.