

School Board-Teacher Liaison A Teacher Handbook

September 2009



Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

Introduction

The responsibility for co-ordination of the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees rests with the Membership Benefits and Services Committee of the NLTA and the staff person assigned to branch operations.

The purpose of this handbook for teacher members on School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees is to provide basic information and guidelines which will assist teacher appointees to such committees to get the most from their meetings.

The Liaison Committees are designed to provide, through discussion, the opportunity for teachers to have direct access to and get responses from representatives of their employer regarding any question or problem involving the educational system of the school district.

This handbook is, therefore, intended as a resource book for committee members and, as such, attempts to lay down some salient suggestions with respect to the selection, administration, role and function of these committees.

Appointment of Teachers to School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees

In accordance with Article 5 (*see page 13 of this booklet*) of the Collective Agreement, the NLTA Executive, through the Membership Benefits and Services, Committee appoints teacher-members to a Liaison Committee for each school district in the province.

The following procedure is used in the appointment of such teacher members:

1. Each branch located within the boundaries of a school board is requested to nominate its branch president (or designate) as a nominee to the school board-teacher liaison committee.
2. The Membership Benefits and Services Committee then appoints up to four (4) of these nominees from each board as the committee which will represent all teachers employed by that particular school board.
3. To ensure workable committees, the Membership Benefits and Services Committee reserves the right to use geographical considerations in choosing liaison committee nominees.
4. Committee members will be appointed by no later than October 31st of each school year.

Financing for the Teacher Appointees to the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees

A. Policy

It is NLTA policy to reimburse teachers for expenses incurred in attending committee meetings outside the home community.

B. Financial Arrangements

Please be guided by the following:

1. Use the most economical means of transportation.
2. Share travelling facilities where possible.
3. For travel in one's own car, claim at the current rate as per NLTA policy.
4. Charge for actual cost of meals travelling to, at, and coming from meetings to the maximum allowable under current NLTA policy.
5. Charge actual cost of accommodations if it is necessary to stay overnight.
6. Establish an initial understanding with your branch executive on all expenses of committee work. They may agree to reimburse you immediately and forward claim to the office for reimbursement or they may suggest that you submit your claim directly to the NLTA office. Remember to procure and attach receipts when possible.
7. A report of the liaison meeting or a copy of the minutes must be forwarded to the NLTA office before reimbursements are made.
8. No teacher should be out-of pocket for doing Association work. Report all unusual circumstances to NLTA office.

Terms of Reference and Guidelines for School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees

In an attempt to ensure the smooth working of School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees, the NLTA has developed terms of reference and guidelines for committee operations. The terms and general guidelines have been discussed with representatives of the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association.

A. Terms of Reference

1. To discuss items of mutual interest and concern between a school board and its teachers.
2. To act as a sounding board for ideas when the school board is developing policies on educational matters or on matters affecting the working conditions of teachers.
3. The Committee shall not deal with grievances nor discuss the modification of the collective agreement or any other matter properly left to the normal collective bargaining process.

B. General Objectives

1. To improve teacher-board relations.
2. To contribute to a high level of morale in the school system.
3. To improve the general efficiency of the school system.
4. To provide effective and immediate two-way communication for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the operation of the educational system within the school district.
5. To discuss education needs, trends and innovations and their instructional and administrative implications.
6. To anticipate and deal with problems that may interfere with the effectiveness of the educational process.
7. To be an effective mechanism for the discussion of issues of a local nature within the school district.

C. General Guidelines

1. Meetings shall be held in accordance with Article 5:03 of the Collective Agreement.
2. The Committee shall be primarily advisory in nature.

3. The Committee shall not attempt to deal with grievances as outlined by Article 31 of the Collective Agreement.
4. Rules of procedure shall be established in accordance with Article 5:04 of the Collective Agreement.
5. The Committee shall keep records of meetings to insure accurate reporting.

D. Specific Guidelines for Teacher Representatives

1. Study all articles of the agreement and seek from the NLTA Benefits and Economic Services Division clarification of articles where doubt exists as to interpretation.
2. Know, and strictly adhere to, the terms of reference and general guidelines of the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee.
3. Exercise professional ethics at all meetings. Issues which conflict with the NLTA Code of Ethics should not be dealt with at School Board-Teacher Liaison meetings.
4. Develop sound rationale for positions taken.
5. Be very wary of permitting discussions to lead to an impasse. Move to have such matters tabled, then seek further information and advice.
6. Be alert to concerns of teachers you represent. Endeavour to identify widespread or particularly difficult problems, communicate these to the NLTA staff member responsible for branch operations and keep teachers informed of all developments.
7. Give advice on procedures for strengthening the relationship between teachers and the school board.

E. The Teacher Representative and the Collective Agreement

All members of School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees must be thoroughly familiar with the Collective Agreement. When issues or concerns are raised at the Committee table that directly relate to or affect terms and conditions of teachers' employment, members will be able to recognize the situation and act accordingly.

In some instances, teachers might report to the teacher representatives on the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee situations that should properly be the subject of a grievance between a teacher and the board. The teacher should be informed that such a situation should be immediately reported to the Benefits and Economic Services Division at the NLTA office. They will advise how to proceed and, in addition, will personally follow up to see that due process is given. Individual grievances should be

pursued in the above manner and should not become an agenda item for discussion at the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee meeting.

In the event that such an issue arises from discussion at the table, it is the responsibility of the teacher representatives to ask that the issue be removed from the table and see that no further discussion takes place on it.

Meetings of the Teacher Appointees

We cannot stress too strongly the importance of meetings of the appointees prior to their meetings with the school board appointees. These meetings are very important as an opportunity for the teacher appointees to develop a unified approach to the first, and each subsequent meeting. Only if the teacher appointees are well prepared and have a good understanding of what they are attempting to do will they be able to competently serve their fellow teachers. Because of the value of these meetings, the teacher appointees should allot sufficient time to adequately deal with items of interest whether their meetings are held on the same day as the actual School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee meetings or on some earlier date. Some of the concerns which these meetings could address might be as follows:

A. Cohesiveness

- to provide an opportunity to get to know the other teacher appointees;
- to identify those areas where each appointee or the group feels most competent or best informed, as well as more information may be necessary;
- to aid each individual appointee, if necessary, to become more knowledgeable in any areas of concern;
- to decide, if necessary, which appointee will be the spokesperson for the group on a particular issue at the School Board-Teacher Liaison meeting;
- to make certain that the items that are to be discussed fall within the mandate given to your Committee and that they are not solely of a personal nature or do not infringe upon the Collective Agreement.

B. Smooth Operation

- to decide on a course of action if a meeting has not yet been called;
- to arrange for one of you to report on your meetings;
- to discuss the rules of procedure you would want to pursue as per Article 5:04;
- to have a clear understanding of what you are to bring up at the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee meeting, especially with regard to the direction in which you wish to pursue the concerns of teachers;

- to carefully consider any items which the school board may have listed, if there is a pre-arranged agenda, and to come up with a united approach for the discussion of these items at the meeting.

C. Maximum Utilization of the Process

- to plan the most effective means of utilizing the meeting with school board representatives;
- to decide on which items of concern should be given priority attention at the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee meeting;
- to be constantly aware of the time so that the meeting does not slip away with little of note being accomplished;
- to be constantly on the lookout for friction developing between appointees on both sides and to work to alleviate this friction since the purpose of the meeting is to have a better understanding between the school board and teachers about certain areas of concern and not to create new and possibly even more serious problems;
- to end the meeting with a definite date and a tentative agenda for the next meeting if at all possible.

D. Your Role as a Teacher Representative

- to open and maintain lines of communication and cooperation with the school board representatives so that issues can be discussed and solutions reached;
- to determine how you can best maintain a two-way communication with branch members;
- to insure that the priority concerns of teachers are being brought to you and will receive adequate attention;
- to determine how to best publicize your meetings so that the teachers are more aware of your Committee and its activities;
- to decide on the best way to provide information about your meetings to teachers at large after each meeting is completed;
- to decide on how you can make yourselves more available to the teachers so that they can express their concerns.

Communications

A. Obtaining Teacher Input

It is important that the branch president (or designate) appointed set up procedures for obtaining input from teachers regarding issues that teachers wish to have brought to the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee. Regular contact with the executive(s) of the branch(es) within the school board, with schools and board offices, and with branch meetings needs to be established and followed so that teachers and branches have sufficient opportunity to be aware of the liaison process and to suggest issues for liaison committee meetings.

B. Reporting on Meetings

In communicating the results of School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee meetings, report to the following:

1. Teachers whom you represent.
2. All NLTA branches under your school board, including those not represented on the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee.
3. The Assistant to the President of NLTA who is the NLTA staff person responsible for branch operations.

C. Suggested Communication Channels

1. Obtain copies of minutes of each meeting, or summaries of discussions and decisions, for circulation to the groups listed above.
2. Report regularly to NLTA branch meetings on the work of your Committee. This might involve visitation to NLTA branches under your board who are not represented on the School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee. Ideally, School Board-Teacher Liaison would be a regular item on the agenda for branch meetings.
3. Establish a reporting system with the school board representatives on the Committee. This might involve utilization of school board office staff (e.g., forwarding of minutes of meetings to teachers in all schools under the board, or a general memo via the school board reporting to all teachers employed by the board on the meetings held).

It is recommended that you use the most effective channel(s) of communication for your area.

Roles

A. The Role of the Appointees

The appointees must be capable of dealing with problems presented and endeavour at all times to avoid clashes of personalities. However divergent the points of view of both sides may be, they always deserve an attentive ear. The appointees should be capable of responding to the merits of any presentation rather than to the presenter.

Equally important is the extent to which the appointee is informed of the Schools Act and its amendments, the Collective Bargaining Legislation and the Collective Agreement. It little serves the purpose of teachers to have an appointee go before the school board representatives and be found lacking in the knowledge of his/her own profession. It is therefore highly desirable that the appointee be prepared to study and become informed on these items.

B. The Role of the Committee

1. Liaison must be built on common ground. The School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee represents two distinctly different entities. Both have goals, policies and procedures which are identical in some cases, only similar in others and totally dissimilar in still other cases. It is only if concentration is placed on the commonalities of both groups that new levels of cooperation will be achieved.
2. If only the members of the Committee understand and communicate with each other, then the process of liaison has merely begun. That process will not be completed unless communication occurs between the Committee members and those they represent. The success of liaison will be a direct result of how well the Committee members succeed in setting up an effective channel of communication with their respective groups.
3. The representatives of each group must remember that they speak on behalf of their groups and not solely on their own. Both groups, then, should have elicited, assimilated and discussed prior to any meetings the point of view of those they represent so as to form a cohesive force in a meeting situation; not a sprinkling of diverse ideas. If this is not done, meaningful liaison will be impossible.

C. The Role of the Branch Executive

The executive of each branch in a particular school board district can assist in making the liaison process work.

1. Branch executives should identify the concerns of teachers in their area and pass this information on to the teacher representatives. The Association has

identified a chairperson of teacher appointees for each Committee. If a branch does not have a representative on the Committee, use that contact person.

2. Branch executives should provide a time-slot at each meeting to receive and discuss items for liaison and/or to communicate feedback from liaison sessions.

D. Role of NLTA

For School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees to effectively carry out their mandate, NLTA will play a positive role in advising and preparing teacher Committee members and in making teachers aware of the process. This can be accomplished in several ways:

1. NLTA staff members will be available to provide direction and expertise when needed in areas such as:
 - (a) the role of teacher members,
 - (b) duties and responsibilities of teacher members as well as the Committee as a whole,
 - (c) the dynamics of discussion and other techniques which can be used to identify and solve problems satisfactorily, and
 - (d) the parameters within which teacher-members should stay in dealing with identified problems or issues.
2. NLTA will familiarize the teaching community with the concept of School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees so that teachers are aware of the existence, mandate and accomplishments of such committees.

Sample Topics

The following list of topics has been garnered from sets of minutes and/or reports from various School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees of past years. A review of this list may help you in determining the types of issues that are part of the liaison process. Are these issues of concern in your branch?

A. Administrative Issues

1. School Attendance
2. School Bus Safety
3. School Bus Monitors
4. Hiring Practices
5. Transfers
6. Holiday Schedule
7. Insurance
8. Financial Support to Attend Workshops
9. Budget Preparation
10. Dismissal Time
11. Lighting/Air Quality
12. Consistency of Staffing Allocations
13. Layoff Procedures
14. Common Standard in Timetabling
15. School Board Policy on Expulsions
16. Management of Declining Enrolments
17. Playground Facilities
18. School Bus Schedules
19. Fire Safety Regulations – The Teachers' Role
20. Instructional Materials
21. Janitorial Services
22. School Board By-Laws

23. Physical Conditions of Buildings/Classrooms
24. Board Policy on Inservice
25. Board's Policy on Use of Facilities
26. School Board's Use of Bank of Workshop Days

B. Pedagogical Issues

1. Curriculum Enrichment
2. Common Exams
3. Procedures for Initiating New Programs
4. Teacher Input into New Programs
5. Gender Equity Issues in the Curriculum

C. Teacher Issues

1. Teacher Morale
2. Disruptive Students
3. Educational Leave
4. Orientation for New Teachers
5. Teacher Allocation to Schools
6. Teacher Workload
7. Teacher Obligations
8. Teacher Evaluation Policy
9. Leaves Without Pay
10. Secretarial Help for Schools
11. Teacher Accountability
12. Teacher Stress
13. Photocopying Budgets
14. Provision of Substitutes for Teachers to Accompany Sports Teams/Other Groups
15. School Councils (Teacher Involvement)
16. School Board Recognition of Teacher Service

17. Preparation Time
18. Quality of Worklife
19. Teacher Abuse
20. Conflict Resolution
21. Building Position School Relationships
22. Building Position School Environments
23. School Leadership and Team Building

D. Student Issues

1. Drop-Out Rate
2. School Sports Newfoundland and Labrador
3. Career Guidance
4. Motivation of Students
5. Extra-Curricular Activities
6. Student Rights – Implications for Teachers and School Boards
7. Fundraising by Students

E. School Issues

1. Home/School/Board Communications
2. School Board Policies
3. School Board's Policy on Volunteers in Schools, Teacher Assistants
4. School-Community Relations
5. Class Size (see Article 30 of Collective Agreement)
6. Timetabling/Scheduling

Provincial Collective Agreement – Article 5

- 5.01** Unless otherwise mutually agreed by the parties concerned, there shall be appointed for each School board a School Board-Teacher Liaison Committee. This Committee shall be composed of four (4) representatives, at least three (3) of whom shall be school board members, and one (1) of whom shall be the Director of Education, or designate, and up to four (4) representatives who are employed by the School board appointed by the Association.
- 5.02** Each appointee shall serve as a member of the Committee for a two-year period or until the member is earlier replaced by the appointing party.
- 5.03** Unless otherwise agreed by the members of the Committee, the Committee shall meet three (3) times a year at mutually agreed times and places, The first meeting shall be called by a teacher representative so charged and should be held not later than November 30 of that school year.
- 5.04** At the first meeting, the Committee shall make the rules of procedure that it considers necessary or desirable for its proper functioning.
- 5.05** (a) The Committee shall concern itself with matters designed to improve the teaching and learning situation, or other matters of mutual interest and concern at the school level.
- (b) The Committee shall not deal with grievances nor discuss the modification of the Collective Agreement or any other matter properly left to the normal collective bargaining process. No agreement, decision or action of the Committee shall be construed by any party as an interpretation or modification of this Agreement.
- 5.06** (a) It is understood that meetings of this Committee would normally take place outside of school hours. However, in the event that such meetings demand absences from regular school duties, such absences shall be accepted as a valid reason for hiring substitute teachers and no teacher serving on this Committee shall lose salary, sick leave, pension or other benefits due to absences from regular teaching duties under this Article.
- (b) Each party shall assume responsibility for the administrative and travelling expenses of its representatives on the Committee.



**Newfoundland and Labrador
Teachers' Association**

Mission Statement

We dedicate ourselves to the professional excellence and personal well-being of teachers, through support, advocacy, educational leadership and the development and delivery of outstanding programs and services.