

## **COVID 19 – 2020-2021 UPDATE #2 (November 4)**

Colleagues,

I felt I needed to reach out to you, especially today on National Stress Awareness Day. You have all been working so hard to adapt to the new protocols and procedures now the entire landscape has changed again. Some of us are taking on a classroom for the first time in many years, others have had their course load turned upside down, while others are having to find new ways to do things that seemed like simple tasks a year ago. This has affected everyone of us differently, but it HAS affected everyone!

It has been my experience that almost all of the seemingly insurmountable issues, that were brought to my attention at the end of last week, were dealt with at a school level. If you are facing a challenge do not be afraid to reach out to the teacher next door, your school leader or any of your colleagues, BTA members are an amazing network of support.

One of the many ways to dial down your stress level is by connecting with those who are supportive. We cannot serve our students if our own cups are empty. What has been really reinforced to me, during this time of stress and uncertainty is teachers have each other's backs. It is amazing how teachers are bailing together to help one another; moving furniture, preparing course material, setting up for the new orange level requirements and anything else that is needed. The support of our colleagues during these difficult times, helps to top up our cups Thank you!

As BTA President, I am also here to provide support, advocate on your behalf and direct you to the services our organization can provide. If you are struggling please reach out. Let your Association help to refill your cup.

The support among colleagues, as we transition to level orange, has proven we are all in this together!

Cale Dunbar  
President, Brandon Teachers' Association.

The following resources are available through the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

MTS  
Educator Assistance Program  
Toll Free: 1-800-555-9336  
Phone: 204-837-5802

B.O.U.N.C.E. Sheet  
Links to crisis support as well as ideas to help take care of your mental health.  
<http://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2020/04/13/the-bounce-sheet/>

MTS Action update:  
**MTS update Oct. 30 2020 (attached)**

# MTS ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

YOUR UNION WORKING FOR YOU



Over the past months, MTS has heard from hundreds of members across the province about the challenges of teaching in this COVID-19 reality. This feedback has been instrumental in helping guide our advocacy and lobbying efforts with government.

Here are some of the actions we have taken on your behalf, along with some outstanding issues that we are continuing to raise with government.

## Safety

MTS was successful in its call for the mandatory wearing of masks in public schools.

The Society is calling on the government to:

- reduce class sizes to help achieve the two-metres of physical distance
- hire more teachers and EAs to facilitate a reduction in class size
- provide better access to Health Links and COVID-19 testing for school staff

## Consistency

MTS was successful in ensuring that teachers can now stay home when ill, without having to provide a sick note.

The Society is calling on the government to:

- mandate policies and protocols to ensure optimal safety for all staff, such as ensuring that all school divisions adhere to public health orders for conditions under which students can return to school after being ill

## Achievable expectations

MTS was successful in lobbying the government to suspend Grade 12 exams for January 2021.

The Society is calling on the government to:

- review provincial report card requirements for teachers and school leaders
- suspend the requirement for teacher and support staff evaluations this year
- credit school divisions with the three non-instructional days that were taken on September 2-4, with the mandated early return to school for teachers
- permit school divisions to schedule weekly non-instructional time, up to a half-day, for schools to plan, prepare, pivot, and provide sustainable instruction and support for all students

## Blended-learning

MTS will not accept a model in which teachers provide in-person and remote instruction simultaneously. In Code Orange, when temporary remote learning is offered as a choice for parents, the impact on teacher workload is intensified.

The Society is calling on school divisions to:

- discontinue the 'duplex model' (splitting one classroom into two to allow for two-metres of physical distance. This model results in one teacher being responsible for two distinct sets of learners in two locations.)
- hire more teachers and EAs
- provide increased planning time to coordinate new learning and delivery formats
- provide increased planning time for teachers who are reassigned
- provide resources and professional learning opportunities
- provide assurance that cameras required for blended-learning, will only be used for instruction purposes and not as a means of monitoring employees

## Mental health

MTS continues to raise mental health and wellness as a serious concern.

The Society is calling on school divisions to:

- establish mechanisms for ongoing teacher feedback
- invest in supports to prevent teacher burn out
- provide supports for the social and emotional impacts of positive cases in a school
- set expectations and provide supports for teachers to set boundaries to maintain work/life balance
- provide clear and consistent communication of roles and expectations

## Substitute teachers

There is a shortage of substitute teachers under normal circumstances, which will now be far more pronounced as teachers heed public health advice to stay home when sick.

The Society is calling on the government to:

- create a plan for recruiting and retaining substitute teachers
- establish a bank of sick days for COVID-19 related purposes, accessible to substitute teachers

## When in doubt, reach out

Perhaps you are being asked to clean your classroom, move furniture or drive a child with flu-like symptoms home. Is this part of your job? When in doubt, reach out.

Contact a Staff Officer for any questions or concerns related to the issues here, or any that may arise over the coming months.

**MTS Staff Officers can be reached at the numbers listed below:**

**Phone: (204) 888-7961 Toll Free: 1-800-262-8803**

## Use your voice

Speak to colleagues; speak to parents; speak to friends and neighbours (safely, of course) about the realities in your classroom. Send a letter to your MLA, the education minister and premier – describe your day, your challenges – tell them what you need to succeed.

Tell us your experience. We can use the tools at our disposal to spread the word.

**Your voice is a powerful tool. Use it.**