

ON TEACHERS AND MEETINGS

NOTE: *I am not presenting this as an official RCSTA position because I don't think one position can apply to all of the different scenarios that might arise over the course of a school year. But with Executive approval I do present these points believing that they are in line with the notion of PROFESSIONALISM as outlined in another paper on this site. Underlined words and phrases are mine, for emphasis and because they have specific importance to the connotation.*

1. Although there is no such thing as a "necessary evil" (those who majored in Catholic moral theology will back that up!), perhaps meetings come closer to that notion than just about anything else we do – or maybe it just seems that way. Nevertheless, meetings should be kept to the necessary minimum; they should be efficient; purposes should be clear; ideally, agendas should be provided beforehand; and participation should be active, not passive.
2. Subsequent to #1, the dissemination of straight forward informational points should not require the convening of a meeting. But, that means people have to read memos, listen for announcements, respect deadlines (when reasonable), check in occasionally to see if something has been missed and speak with colleagues regularly about operational matters to make sure nothing has been missed.
3. Those who don't teach, but who do call meetings, should be cautious about removing those who do teach from their classrooms to the point where students feel detrimental effects. Surely no one believes that excessive disruptions to the teaching relationship between a teacher and his or her class are beneficial.
4. When appropriate meetings are called ("appropriate" - see next point for clarification) everyone should attend unless something prevents such attendance just as it would have prevented one

from attending to one's teaching responsibilities. To dodge such meetings is irresponsible and also unfair to colleagues who do attend.

5. With respect to point #4 – what constitutes an essential and therefore mandatory meeting? Obviously any meetings scheduled during institute & TPD days; the monthly staff meetings in high schools with the expectation that part of that meeting occurs during the instructional day and part may extend beyond that; meetings within the 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the classroom day and 15 minutes immediately after; legitimate emergent meetings for the purpose of providing information that could affect the safety and welfare of staff and students, even if those meetings should fall outside the instructional day. Of course any other meetings to which staff have input – (timing, content, purpose etc.) can be called and attendance encouraged but not mandated. Schools are not like law firms, profit driven corporations, or patent-seeking R. & D. departments where getting ahead of the competition is the goal.

6. N.B. For EVERYONE'S CLARIFICATION:

Taken directly from the **Education Act 1995** (which is Law and therefore non-negotiable): The instructional year, the instructional day (5h 30m), holidays (weekends included) and any restrictions to or modifications thereof are clearly set out in Sections 163 & 164. A reasonable standard commonly practiced around the province recognizes that teachers are to be at school 15 minutes prior to the start of instruction, and remain for 15 minutes at the completion of instruction. Weekends, holidays, noon hours and recess are not appropriate times for mandated meetings. Again, if staff members choose to convene meetings at such times based on a consensus, then they may proceed with the expectation that attendance be optional. Under the **Duties of Teachers** (Sec. 231 o): "*teachers shall attend regularly all meetings of the staff called by the principal or the director*". Clearly this requires some interpretation. "Regularly" suggests meetings that fall within the time frames outlined in #5 since work outside of those parameters would itself be

irregular. It certainly doesn't mean all meetings absolutely. A 6:30 A.M. or 10:30 P.M. meeting could hardly be mandated and any reasonable adjudicator (like a judge, if it were to proceed that far) would rule such a demand to be unreasonable, except perhaps during war-time. Under the **Duties of Principals** (Sec. 175, 2,): subsections b, h, k & l all make reference to the relationship between Principals and staff (including those circumstances that might require meetings) using the phrases "in cooperation with the staff" (twice) and "in consultation with the staff" (twice). Interestingly enough, nowhere under the duties of Principals does it say that Principals shall call meetings! This seems to reaffirm my point about the difference between educational institutions and other workplaces: if meetings were a high priority item in our workplace, then one would think that would be articulated as such in the Act .

So, has all this really answered the over-riding question? Probably not in the black and white way we all hoped for. Obviously a balance between the duties of Principals and the duties of Teachers, a balance that recognizes both groups as professionals, and both groups as members of the same Federation and Association is what is required, and of course, ideally, is what should be desired. "Collaboration", "Collegiality", "Cooperation", "Consultation" are all words that have been beaten to death – but since we have used them ad infinitum over the years, we should live up to them. That is what will contribute to an efficient and congenial workplace – a genuine Professional Learning Community.

To those who would otherwise force the issue I offer this (very unoriginal) advice: you can lead the horse to water, it likely won't drink, and then you will be left trying to milk a dead cow!
