

President's Message

Unions are and always have been human rights organizations. While the primary mandate of a union is to protect the rights of workers, that mandate easily translates into protecting the rights of all people, members or not. In a narrow sense the logic goes like this: if a union can move society forward on an issue of human rights, then its members will be greater protected in the workplace. It is simply easier to protect workers' rights when those rights are embedded in values held by the society at large. In a broader sense, fighting for human rights is simply a moral thing to do. For example, we, as a society, can agree, that a person has the right of safety. Putting procedures in place to deal with violence workplace then, becomes a logistical matter, not a fight over the whether it is the right thing to do. Guided by this same principle, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has recently begun an awareness campaign about domestic violence by asking the rhetorical question: can work be safe, when home isn't? The campaign, entitled Domestic Violence at Work, looks at how workers who experience violence at home are affected when they come to work – and how unions and other workplace organizations can assist. As a start, the CLC has created an online resource centre at www.domesticviolenceatwork.ca. Domestic violence is a complex emotional and social issue; one I will not try to dissect here. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, or if you want to learn more to fight for this basic human right, the website is a good place to start. Remember as well, that the Manitoba Teachers' Society, through its Educator Assistance Program (EAP), provides counselling for this and any other issue you or your colleagues might be facing.

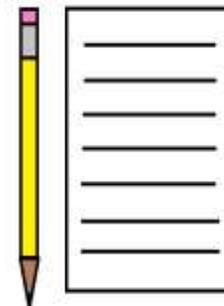
Group Benefits (image from www.coolheadtech.com)

The new MTS website includes significantly improved availability to group benefits information. From the main MTS website select the drop-down menu "Health and Benefits" and then select "[MTS Group Benefits](#)." From here you will find links to the group benefits available to you, specifically, as a member of the Interlake Teachers' Association. There are documents related to the ITA Blue Cross Health and Dental Plans as well as more general information regarding long term disability, deferred salary, optional life, and pension information.



Opinions Wanted

From time to time the Interlake School Division releases proposed policy statements for feedback from stakeholders. The most recent such release is the new policy on student conduct, suspensions, and expulsions and how these relate to restitution. The draft policy is available from me, your principal, or from the division. Feedback can be given directly to the division either electronically or on paper and is due November 23. It is part of my role as President to dialog with the division on its policy, therefore, if any of you feel more comfortable going through me, you can direct your feedback to me and I will include your comments with the ones I submit.



Teacher's Right to Suspend

Speaking of suspensions, I am routinely asked about the teacher's right to suspend a student. Here is what the Public Schools Act says:

- 40.3(1) Subject to section 40.4, a teacher in a school may suspend from the classroom, for a period of not more than two days, a pupil who engages in conduct (a) that the teacher considers detrimental to the classroom learning environment; and (b) if the school has adopted a code of conduct, that contravenes that code.**
- 40.3(2) A teacher who suspends a pupil must promptly document and report the suspension to the principal who must keep a record of each suspension.**
- 40.3(3) The principal shall ensure that the parent is promptly informed of a suspension under this section and the reasons for the suspension.**

As with any right, these suspensions should be exercised responsibly. Schools in the Interlake have protocols around these suspensions and, if you are contemplating exercising this right, make sure you discuss the proper procedure with your principal. In fact, the Act contemplates that teacher initiated suspensions might be misused by adding:

- 40.4 If at any time the school board is of the opinion that a teacher (a) has repeatedly suspended an individual pupil from the classroom for reasons that are not justified; or (b) has repeatedly exercised his or her right to suspend pupils from the classroom in a manner or for reasons that are not justified; the board may limit or place conditions on the teacher's right to suspend under section 40.3 either with respect to an individual pupil or generally.**

As we move forward with a philosophy of restitution, hopefully teacher initiated suspensions will be increasingly unnecessary and then only as a last resort; however, if circumstances and your professional judgment warrant, you should know that you do have this right under the law. Just make sure to follow school procedures when you exercise it.