



President's Message: Breaking up is hard to do

To say that the tone of this first newsletter has taken me months to figure out, would not be exaggerating the truth. Reflecting back, I recall a spring filled with a flurry of one-on-one lessons, virtual meetings, cumulative assessments and data driven report cards, but most of all, a whole division of gutsy colleagues who did everything in their power to “get their kids through” it all. The summer months couldn't outshine the glaringly obvious inequities in both remote learning and support systems for our students and their families. And the early return of fall kept far too many teachers, working far too many hours preparing for... well... most of the time, we didn't know what.

As the entire world learned to be more in tune with each other, be kinder, sit quieter and reflect longer, the power of music has remained constant for many. During a drive toward work and so many unknowns, a song by Sara Evans hit the right note. “A Little Bit Stronger” is about a break up, and all the dynamics we encounter in that process. When you really look at it, this school year can only move forward if we break up with the last many years, and end the relationship of how school used to be. Education may not look “the same” for a long time, and maybe not ever. But is that so bad? We all know what happens when we try to rekindle what we know is over, and it is never a good idea to make that late-night call or regretful text. At some point, we all know it is the healthiest and best to move on. This year brings that freedom, and an open opportunity to go with it.

Does that mean you have to look for completely different things in your next relationship? Maybe, but I don't believe so. I think we take all of the traits from previous relationships that we liked and didn't like, and we use them both to move on to the next. We look harder to find those things that mattered, filled our bucket and were worth it. In education, so much of last year was new and had to be learned so fast, but in the end was helpful in expanding and maybe even improving teaching practices. We have the support to make this time around so much better, with an entire Program Support Department (up 300%), with Program Support – John Bock, Literacy Support – Lori-Anne Busch, and Numeracy Support – Christine Michalysen, prepared to help. The things that didn't work in the relationship also come to light. There is no question there were flaws in the system. MTS has continually engaged with MB Gov and MSBA, and is working to lessen the impact that Covid-19 will have on teacher workload, anxiety, substitute availability and teacher pay and benefits.

So much of what teachers put into teaching is not going to change. Don't break up with who you are for your people, but perhaps find other media outlets to play your message. Don't depart from what keeps kids coming to your “classroom”, even though the venue may have changed. Seek out like-minded colleagues to create spontaneous PD opportunities. Use MTS PD DAY on October 23 ([LINK](#)) to chase a passion or firm up that thing you didn't have time for 6 months ago. Take care of and be kind to yourself and each other, reach out when you need, and start each week “a little bit stronger”.

*“I know my heart will never be the same, but I'm telling myself I'll be okay.
Even on my weakest days, I get a little bit stronger.” Sara Evans*

MTS NEWS:**MTS POSITIONS AND CONCERNS – Planning for a Safe and Sustainable Return to School:**

Each of the issues MTS is advocating for, (go to [LINK](#)) takes a unique and heavy toll on teachers, clinicians, school leaders, and substitute teachers. **The Manitoba Teachers' Society continues to advocate strongly for a safe and sustainable school re-opening**, to raise issues about the intensification of workload, and to call for measures that ensure the well-being of educators. We may get through the front door ok, but how do we stay open for business?

Issues include:

- Public Health Orders
- Outbreak Management
- Protection of Teachers
- Class Size and Room Density
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Workload Intensification
- Recovery Learning
- Professional Learning
- Substitute Teachers

What is my union doing for me right now?

MTS has been asking local presidents and executives to provide them with the next line of concerns and most worrisome questions. They met with MB Education, MSBA and other stakeholders this week, and took with them the following concerns that are province wide right now.

- Sick Leave Provisions
- Accommodations
- Public Health Orders/Communication of cases/Cohort self-isolation
- Outbreak Prevention/Class Sizes/Inequity of social distancing measures in schools vs. community
- Colony Schools & public health orders, cleaning, social-distancing and self-isolating practices
- Staffing – where is the \$52 million from the province and \$83 million from the federal government going to be spent? Why not on increased staffing and space?
- Re-assignment and added workload for special area teachers.
- Cohorts – Teachers are in contact with 100s of students a day across many cohorts.
- Internal Staff coverage during prep-time due to lack of subs/maintaining duty-free lunch.
- Curriculum & Instruction – teaching same curriculum in half or less time, managing safety versus SLO's and provincial assessments and exams.
- PD – some divisions removed the right for their teachers to attend MTS PD Day, adding an instructional day. ISD calendar has retained October 23 for MTS PD Day and teacher choice.
- Access to more Mental Health Resources including EAP and public support system.

EAP (Educator Assistance Program): Go to this [LINK](#) for more information. Here is the [BROCHURE](#) as well. These services are to help MTS members with well-being and professional mental-health services as needed during our teaching careers, and now maybe more than ever.

MTS LifeSpeak Wellness Platform: Can provide expert help navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. LifeSpeak's experts can help you carve out some peace of mind by giving you tips and strategies that are easy to implement, right now, regarding Covid-19, healthy habits, well-being and more - [LINK](#)

New Teachers – Here is a [LINK](#) to information/resources for you on the MTS website.

Welcome to the Interlake Teachers' Association, ITA. I will be reaching out and hope to meet all of you, (whether in-person or virtual school visits), and at our New Teacher EVENT – details forthcoming. If you have any questions regarding your new job, contract or other queries, please contact me, Cathy Pleskach at president@interlaketeachers.ca or (204) 792-8406. I hope your first few days have gone well, and welcome to the best team of teaching colleagues on the planet.

Some Sick Leave Facts - We follow the Collective Agreement (CA), ([LINK](#)) Sick-leave Article 17.06:

- Members take sick-leave days when they are sick. According to our CA, a member receives 20 sick days at the start of each year (pro-rated), to an accumulation of 130.
- Members take family sick-leave days if caring for sick family members, (3 days per year that come out of your 20 sick days, not over and above).
- Symptomatic members should self-screen at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/> and follow the direction of public health. Sick days are used here since the member is symptomatic.

1. If you are sick and run out of days:

- If you have less than 80 sick days:
 - All sick days are used first.
 - Short-term Disability Insurance bridges the gap from end of sick days to Long-term Disability Insurance. LTDI starts after **80 WORKING DAYS**.
- If you have more than 80 sick days:
 - All sick days are used first.
 - Long-term Disability Insurance starts after all sick days used.

WHY all sick days first? This is a good thing, as sick days pay out at 100% of salary; STDI/LTDI do not.

To access STDI/LTDI there must be a disability/illness. If someone contracts Covid-19 or another illness that prevents them from working, they are covered by these plans. Contact the MTS DBP (Disability Benefits Plan) at **(204) 957-5330 or Toll Free: 1-866-504-9373** should you require their help.

2. If you are not sick - MTS position on forced self-isolation/quarantine:

“If teachers are forced to self-isolate/quarantine, and they are not sick, both MTS and the Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) have agreed that employers (ISD) should try to find meaningful work which may include teaching from home, so that teachers can continue to be paid during this time, without accessing sick leave.”

If teachers are being deducted sick leave when they are not sick, or are losing pay because of lack of sick time, they should immediately contact a Teacher Welfare Staff Officer. MTS Benefits staff indicated that self-isolation is not a disability, so STDI/LTDI will not cover self-isolation.

- 3.** EI has been extended to include up to 10 days of paid sick leave (with no waiting period), for those who run out of sick time. Details of this are still fluid and I will update when available.

Duty to Accommodate: What is duty to accommodate? *“Employers have a legal duty to provide reasonable accommodation for the needs of employees where their needs are based on a characteristic protected under The Human Rights Code of Manitoba.”* Learn more, or if this affects you, at [LINK](#).

MTS Back-to-School FAQs: - [LINK](#) to most up-to-date list. [LINK](#) to previous lists.

I see someone in school displaying symptoms. What should I do?

The Workplace Safety and Health Act and public health orders advise that you must immediately inform your principal.

What happens if someone in school gets sick?

Each school division has a plan that addresses this. Please refer to your division's protocol - [LINK](#), and your school specific plan for details. If you require additional advice, contact a **Teacher Welfare Staff Officer** at **1-800-262-8803**.

What about masks?

Masks are required for students in Grades 4 to 12, teachers, school staff, bus drivers, and visitors when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Younger students may wear masks, if they prefer. Masks will be provided to students and staff who need them. All students and staff on school buses must wear masks. *Click here* for the most up to date guidance on this issue.

I need an accommodation specific to my medical or family issue. What should I do?

Contact a **Teacher Welfare Staff Officer** at **1-800-262-8803** for advice.

When do I ask my principal/supervisor?

If you have any questions regarding your school's plan, scheduling, course work, students or workplace concerns, please communicate these with your principal/supervisor. Work on massaging or refitting plans should be communicated at the school level where it can have a collaborative impact. What works for one school or division will not work for another.

When do I ask my local President or MTS?

Should you have further questions regarding teacher welfare, workload or working conditions, please reach out to me, **Cathy Pleskach, ITA President** at president@interlaketeachers.ca or cell (204) 792-8406. I can meet and work with you, and will connect you with the right contacts to help. If you require additional advice, contact a **Teacher Welfare Staff Officer** at **1-800-262-8803**.

More Questions?

Manitoba Education compiled FAQs to address concerns from Parent/Guardians/Educators. [LINK](#)

Please visit www.mbteach.org, regularly, and be sure to update your My Profile information. Follow ITA on Twitter @InterlakeTA or at www.interlaketeachers.ca.

MB GOV LINKS: [LINK](#) to School re-opening plans for **ALL MB School Divisions**.

- **Journey of the "Restoring Safe Schools" document – Click a date to see that document.**

June 25	July 30	August 24	September 2
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- For the complete "Restart MB: Pandemic Response System and Website, click [HERE](#).
- [SAFEWORK MATTERS Newsletter](#)– Virus Prevention in the Workplace – [LINK](#)

As always, please stay safe and be well. Contact MTS staff or your local president with your questions.