



President's Message: Your Safety is Non-Negotiable

In any other school year, November signals a turn to themes of remembrance, thoughts of sacrifice and appreciation, with large assemblies marked by purposeful silence and respectful reverence. Instead, we are facing an 11th month of working, and more often than not, simply surviving in the time of Covid-19, and work-driven isolation and exhaustion is a factor in every sector of society.

Just shy of a year into this global pandemic, teachers are especially feeling this impact, and it does at times, feel like a marathon without a finish line. We have been asked to pivot within hours in some cases, and have provided without hesitation, professional levels of learning, mentoring, protection and a very different looking school experience than any of us have ever known. The professionalism with which Interlake teachers, principals and clinicians continue to run into the unknown is remarkable, and you need to know your voices have been heard. Many of you have reached out on behalf of colleagues, support staff, students, and occasionally even yourselves. Yes, in that order. I am continually humbled by those of you who look after others ahead of yourself. To you I say, "Thank you, but what about you?" Please say this to yourself... "My safety is non-negotiable." Again. Listen this time and convince yourself. You must feel safe going to work and coming home to your family. If you need more space, PPE, cleaning supplies, training or support to ensure you can meet the guidelines for safety in your workspace, please work with your supervisor to attain them. Please reach out to myself or MTS Teacher Welfare Staff if you feel you need more allies.

MTS is consistently at the Pandemic Response Planning table with Government and Public Health, and they continue to press on many issues. Top of the list has always and continues to be member safety. First for mandatory masks and since and still, for increased distance and decreased class size. The recent move to pandemic response level orange has MTS again pushing government to invest financially in the hiring of teaching, support and custodial staff to achieve this. Please go to this [LINK](#) on the MTS website right now, and saturate social media with the message. Follow, like and retweet the link @mbteachers and @InterlakeTA. We are louder when projecting a unified voice.

At a local level, we have heard you. Thank you for the conversations and survey responses (results coming soon), sharing that you need more space, time and support to face new demands, and that you are worried about the sustainability of the people in all of this. We have taken these issues to ISD. You are worried about managing blended learning. We are grateful that ISD thinking parallels ours, and they have hired remote teachers and supply teachers to ease demand. We know how hard you are working, and I share this message with senior admin often. Support has been provided in many areas, but there is still more work to do. We know this, and are continuing to have those conversations on your behalf, while advocating for the supports you need.

Stay safe and be well...you matter to too many!

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



Provincial Bargaining on the horizon:

This week the Manitoba government introduced legislation to move teachers to provincial bargaining. Bill 45 will establish a single tier, centralized bargaining model for all public school teachers, with the exception of the Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM).

[Bill 45 – The Public Schools Amendment and The Manitoba Teachers’ Society Amendment Act](#), (click the title to go to the act), has been a long time in the making, with the government announcing its intent to move to a provincial bargaining model in 2018. MTS has had discussions with government on this legislation since 2018, having developed its own provincial bargaining policy, almost a decade earlier. [Click here](#) to read more on Bill 45. [Click here](#) for Provincial Bargaining FAQ

What you need to know?

- MTS is prepared with a Provincial Bargaining Protocol, ([click here](#)). The Society will be the central bargaining agent for Manitoba teachers (except for DSFM) when or if the bill is passed, and there is no timing for when this may occur.
- Current collective agreements are followed until a new one is reached. None of the 38 locals have an updated agreement. Our ITA/ISD CA expired June 30, 2018. You will recall the LRTA (Louis Riel Teachers’ Association) agreement awarded through arbitration expired June 30, 2020. PTTA (Pembina Trails Teachers’ Association) goes to arbitration in early January.
- MTS will follow their lead table strategy until any move to provincial bargaining passes. MTS will continue to work with the remaining locals once a PTTA decision occurs.
- **Does MTS support provincial bargaining?** In 2011, bargaining principles and models for a single-tier and two-tier provincial bargaining system were adopted into MTS policy at Provincial Council. MTS supports single-tier provincial bargaining, subject to the following conditions:
 1. Teachers remain governed under the Labour Relations Act.
 2. MTS will bargain directly with the Province of Manitoba (the funder).
 3. Bargaining must be fair and with an open scope.
 4. The mechanisms for dispute resolution, whether strike or interest arbitration, must be without limitation.
 5. The best provisions from existing collective agreements should be the standard for the new contract.
 6. The membership of MTS will remain, as it currently exists.
- **Are there concerns about the government’s provincial bargaining bill?** Yes. One clause reads: *“In making an award, the arbitrator or arbitration board must take into consideration all factors that they consider relevant, including:*
 - (a) *the ability of the school division or school district to pay in light of its fiscal situation; and*
 - (b) *the economic situation in MB.”*

MTS is concerned this may impede the neutrality of the arbitration process. Since arbitration is the only dispute resolution process available to teachers, it is imperative that this process remains virtuous. ITA will continue to keep you updated, but MTS sends regular all-member emails. **Update your MyProfile ([LINK](#)) with a personal email, or risk missing out on bargaining updates.**



Workplace Safety & Health:

Inspections will soon occur in your worksites. Safety is a right of all workers. Please consider inspectors as allies to gain the fixes and supports you require to keep your safety non-negotiable. They report directly to the ISD WSH committee, where labour laws and SafeWork Procedures ensure that the employer works to keep our spaces safe.

You have a right to refuse unsafe work. To summarize; a worker may refuse work if he or she believes on reasonable grounds that the work constitutes a danger to his/her safety or health or to the safety or health of another person. The employee shall promptly report the refusal and the reasons for it to his/her employer or immediate supervisor. The dangerous condition is inspected, and actions necessary to remedy it (fix or work order) are taken. See full Section 43 [HERE](#).

The Fire Code has safety and liability rationales. Training in fire safety should go beyond preparing for fire drills. Keeping a school fire-safe is a day-to-day job and failure to follow code leaves the employer representative, potentially liable for damages. Your inspectors are asked to observe and report any violations of the code, such as everyone's favourite: "Combustible materials attached to classroom walls shall not exceed 20%, and hallways can not exceed 5% of the wall area. Bulletin boards are preferred and can be painted with latex paint rather than covered in paper." Full Code [HERE](#).

MTS advocates for member safety: "Teachers have been and continue to be ready to do their part to arrest the spread of COVID-19, however, the government must do its part to protect them, too," said MTS vice-president Nathan Martindale. "While it closes non-essential services, the province needs to open the tap on funding intended to keep our teachers and students safe." More [HERE](#).

Sick Leave: If you are sick, you use sick days, period. If you have been directed to self-isolate by public health but are not sick, ISD will try to accommodate members working in isolation if the circumstances permit. Please contact me or an MTS staff officer immediately if you find yourself in this situation. If you are out of days: 1. And you are sick, you can access Short Term Disability. 2. If you are out of days and need to self-isolate, you may need to access EI. MTS Staff can help this process. Call **(204)888-7961 or 1-800-262-8803** for any inquires in this area.

Maternity/Parental Leave Information: If you think parenthood may be in your future, it never hurts to learn your rights and how this benefit/leave can work for you. Click [HERE](#) to go to the MTS site and a video, plus additional links to other information.



LifeSpeak Wellness Platform: Looking for support, or information?

LifeSpeak's experts can help you carve out some peace of mind in your world by giving you tips and strategies that are easy to implement, right now. Share this information with your loved ones or colleagues; we can all make a difference. **Click the MTS LifeSpeak Library link [HERE](#).**

Need more support? The **Educator Assistance Program (EAP)** services at MTS are there to help. The rules for the types of services you can access and still be covered under Blue Cross have changed to help members access help sooner and more often. Click [HERE](#) or call EAP for info.

Contact: Send questions or concerns to Cathy at president@interlaketeachers.ca, or contact a **Teacher Welfare Staff Officer** at **(204)888-7961 or 1-800-262-8803**. Visit www.mbteach.org.

"Compassion is the currency that leads to true wealth."

Jim Carrey

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.