

Class Building - Advice to Members

Every May and June, school staff across Ontario meet to develop the class lists for the upcoming year. These conversations, focused on the optimal learning environment for students, can create professional difficulties for the staff of the schools.

The purpose of this edition of PRS Matters is to provide some general advice and offer suggestions for dealing with some of the challenging issues which may arise during these meetings.

Follow Your Collective Agreement

The collective agreement must always be considered during this process. ETFO members should not agree to anything during class building meetings which are in violation of the collective agreement. For example, members should not agree to classes that are over the limits in the collective agreement. While these issues would be discussed at the school staffing committee, they can also arise during the class building process. Be aware of what your collective agreement states about staffing/class size, etc. and ensure that these guidelines are respected. Recognize that school administrators will also have issues such as medical accommodations that need to be factored into class building decisions too.

Be Aware of Student Learning Needs

The focus of class building is to provide the optimal learning environment for students – often discussed during the process is how individual students learn, which other students they may work well with, specific learning challenges they may have, etc. Classes should each contain a comparable mix of students of different genders and abilities – this ensures optimal learning for all students and an equitable workload for staff. ETFO members should remember their obligations to respect the privacy of the personal information of the students within the school. (For more information, see *PRS Matters #64 – Documentation and Personal Information Concerning Students*).

Parental Requests

In some schools the administrator seeks input from parents prior to the start of the class building process. While we appreciate that community input can be a beneficial part of the process, in some cases it has gotten out of hand; these requests can become evaluative about ETFO members and their teaching abilities. In some schools these letters are shared with all who are part of the class building process which is upsetting for the members who the parents might not wish to have teach their child.

Our advice is that in those schools where this information is requested, the information not be shared widely. Members do have a right to know what parents say about them, but this information can be shared privately and professionally. During the class building process, all that needs to be shared is that parent “A” feels their child would learn best in Class “B” without any reasons being given. If there are questions about this, they can be dealt with privately with the school administrator.

Be Respectful of All Colleagues

It is important to remember during the class building process that these classes are being built for the entire school community. Consideration should be paid to rotary situations or situations where the classroom teacher may be away and an occasional teacher is teaching the class for a period of time.

A similar consideration is when the class building process involves building a class for someone who will be new to the school. Often that individual is not hired until after the classes for the upcoming year have been developed. It is important to ensure that these individuals are not given a class which is noticeably different than the other classes at the grade or divisional level. This will ensure that the newly hired teachers have an optimal chance for success in their new career or at a new school.

Members are also reminded of their ethical obligations to colleagues and to not be critical of a colleague, their teaching style, or professional abilities.

Avoid Making Assumptions about Colleagues

One of the issues that can come up during class building meetings is the gender of the teacher. Assumptions are made about students who would do well with a male teacher or a female teacher. As with all assumptions, there are many examples which support the assumption and examples which contradict it. There are many concerns with this – the most significant one being that classes should be equitable for all the staff members in the school.

A related discussion which can happen is that particular students should be placed in one class or another because they need a ‘mother figure’ or a ‘father figure’. When children are placed with a particular teacher to provide a substitute father or mother figure, the potential for professional difficulties exist. Our role is to educate the children in our care – not to be their parent.

Class building, if done appropriately, provides a valuable opportunity to provide an optimal learning environment for students and equitable working conditions for the staff of the school. If done inappropriately, it can leave a bitter taste behind and even set some members of the school staff up for challenges in the coming year.

For more information, contact Professional Relations Staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 at the provincial office.

ST:KH:LL:SM