

Partner Group Questions submitted by DPAC for Discussion on Monday May 3rd

There have been a lot of conversations with PACs parents and families regarding concerns about the effect this Covid pandemic has had on learning.

We acknowledge that teachers have done their best in a difficult year when they have been asked to do more and more with less and less (less certainty, less protection) and that teachers and the public school system are critical to the health and well-being of students and families. That's a heavy load to bear. We acknowledge that teachers in classrooms are critical to reaching students and bringing out their best. This is not to say that other staff members do not contribute in meaningful ways to support our kids - it takes a team, it takes a village.

But teachers. Teachers are something else and we recognize that teachers don't come to the profession as anything less than seeing it as a calling and an honour to support children and the community at large. They are the frontline to children, they become a special part of a student's growth. As adults we all remember special teachers that had an impact on our own growth and brought us to a path we would not have discovered without them. How can we make sure our kids have the same experience without burning out highly trained, compassionate educators?

Is the current pandemic workload sustainable for teachers now? Is pre-pandemic or anticipated post-pandemic workload sustainable for teachers?

What would sustainable workload look like for teachers in elementary school? High school?

What does an optimal classroom workload look like for teachers that allows them to connect with students?

What gaps do they anticipate from the pandemic disruption? How would teachers plan to overcome or adapt their approach to get kids on pace to meet learning goals? What is an ideal path forward?

In high school the stakes are higher and timelines are shorter to correct course before students age out of public education and supports. Could you please also provide additional detail on supports you see as being needed in this area.

We realize that only one board trustee will be at our monthly DPAC meeting this Monday May 3rd and that they can't speak for the board as such, but we would ask for a board response to the above. We also look forward to hearing the PGDTA's view and opinions on this.

#1 Is the current pandemic workload sustainable for teachers now? Is pre-pandemic or anticipated post-pandemic workload sustainable for teachers?

No, too many students – behaviour management is chaotic with such large class sizes and too many students in the school in general.

I am finding the workload fine - not really any different from before the pandemic.

With only two classes on a compressed schedule, workload has been high in high school. You are constantly marking or trying to catch students up. Moving forward, the workload on a quarter system is not sustainable for students or teachers.

no recess break for teachers has been very tough Going 3 hrs 36 mins every morning with no break is exhausting

No the quarter system with no turnaround time in between is not sustainable. The students have higher needs and require more teacher attention and work (ie: SBT meetings, check-ins with case managers, etc.). The lack of collaboration time and ProD has made it hard to collaborate with staff.

I feel the workload did not really change at all this year which was disappointing. It was a transition to get used to teaching 2 long blocks instead of the usual 4 blocks in high school. Students struggled with the long blocks and as a result I found you just could not get through the same workload - for example in Science 8, we really could only cover just over 3 of the units, but did not have time for the 4th unit. Although I know some teachers pushed through all 4, but for some students this would have been overwhelming. I thought it better to teach 3 of them, at a good pace, so the students wouldn't feel overwhelmed.

yes except there needs to be a CLEAR recess break. There isn't enough time in the day to complete everything if we take a learning break....and have time taken away.

No, the workload both pre/post pandemic was not sustainable. Teachers are coping – nothing more, nothing less, just coping. When a workforce is coping, and a severe health crisis is thrust upon them, there will be casualties – one way or another there will be casualties. Whether that be in outright loss of teachers from the system altogether to seek other employment or loss within the system as members simply cannot perform their jobs adequately.

No - workload was not sustainable before and isn't sustainable now. Teachers are continually being asked to do more and more with nothing ever removed from our plates. Student individual needs (IEPs and otherwise) are placing more demands on teachers than ever before and schools are expected to be "full service" locations without additional supports. I have never submitted so many requests for counselling support and Youth Care Worker support as I have this year, and I still feel like we are just plugging holes. But I can only do so much!

#2 What would sustainable workload look like for teachers in elementary school? High school?

Elementary: Class sizes: (K: 14, 1-3: 20, 4-7: 24)

On-Site Support: 1 EA for each classroom MINIMUM

Class composition: evenly distribute students with special needs/category H etc. rather than overloading one classroom teacher and the ONE EA that they get.

\$\$\$: MORE FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL FUNDING per student to match other provinces

Prep time: 40 minutes per day (like Ontario)

Itinerant teachers: more of these to cover prep time

An additional school or two in Prince George as many schools are working ABOVE capacity (ie: firecodes in the gym!) and thus all of the equipment /tools etc. will not last as long, and Jr. Admin are burning out, administrative assistants are burning out...

Curriculum and reporting guidelines: our district (and province) can do better on this; it seems to me that teachers are all over the place and overwhelmed. The autonomy is appreciated but the lack of guidance is frustrating (at a provincial level)

Same as it did before the pandemic.

In high school, a sustainable workload is achievable under the semester system with a year long prep or repeated courses within the semester.

High school increased prep time that isn't taken away from covering of other classes ideally in the semester where the workload is greatest.

High school - Just need more prep time!!!. It's tiring to be "on" all day teaching, then have to do prep and marking on your own time later and on weekends. Every night you're prepping and marking is ongoing. Lunchtimes are spent photocopying or prepping for activities/labs. Prep time and marking time takes away from self care and from your family time.

Every quarter - every semester, should have some time to prep and mark. It would make for more relaxed teachers and better teaching.

A sustainable workload would include a fully funded education system with districts such as ours not seeking to meet minimum obligations at every opportunity – rather the ministry/district should acknowledge the severe mental/emotional/physical toll this pandemic has had on all employees and boost supports in individual classrooms to exceed the 'minimum' ratios that senior administration are proud to say they meet. IEP's should not be loaded in classrooms and for every IEP in a classroom there should be a lowering of the class limit by additional student(s). If the district is ok with 6 IEP's in a classroom (and they are) then they should be prepared to enroll FEWER students in said classroom to make that teacher's workload sustainable.

Class compositions need to be addressed in a serious way. There should be a consideration that the more complex the class is with learning needs, the less students the class has. It is unreasonable to expect that a classroom of 29 with multiple IEPs (7 in my class this year) is a sustainable workload for one teacher. If this workload is not addressed the only places that can "give" is teacher mental health (or teachers leaving the profession) or else it impacts student education. We simply can't do it all.

#3 What does an optimal classroom workload look like for teachers that allows them to connect with students?

See above answers; emphasis on smaller class sizes/more schools/ smaller catchments

Connection with students can only be achieved with reduced class sizes or some sort of teacher advisory group during the day.

Less students (about 20) and time built into our schedule for meetings with case managers etc.

Adequate support in class to help students who need the support (otherwise teacher is running about classroom, 'stretched too thin' trying to help every student). Time to prep adequately, so that classroom time is optimized. In Foods, I try to prep while students are working, so I don't have to work late afterschool or through my lunch, but then I can't spend that time connecting with students.

Optimal classroom workload levels for teachers is not a 'one formula fits all' solution. Just as there are any number of different students with varying learning strengths/challenges there are different teachers in the system with different strengths. One thing I can say with certainty is that even with experienced 'master teachers' working in classrooms there will always be students who don't get the connection they need simply because there are just too many students in EVERY classroom in BC. When one discusses 'optimal' workload there needs to be a balance of class size/composition. More complex classroom needs require much fewer students while classes with fewer 'individual needs' may be ok with a few more students. Optimal classroom workloads are DIRECTLY related to size/composition – this fundamental issue is at the core of any 'workload' discussion in education in BC. Fewer students in each class and fewer IEP's in every class = more optimal workload.

#4 What gaps do they anticipate from the pandemic disruption? How would teachers plan to overcome or adapt their approach to get kids on pace to meet learning goals? What is an ideal path forward?

Personally, I don't think any gaps really matter. By the time all of the students graduate, they'll be where they need to be / the world and society will adjust. It's fine so long as their social-emotional is developed and they feel safe.

The only gaps come from the district policy that all students in the second semester last year could not receive a grade lower than the pre-Spring Break grade. There were a number of students who did little to no work on the courses and were passed. This means they are coming into the next grade without the background knowledge for the new course.

In mathematics, there will be a widening of the gap in what students can do and what we expect them to be able to do. There will have to be a balance in curricular demands and remedial instruction to fill the gaps left by the pandemic. Likely, we will see more students opting for a remedial mathematics stream.

The gaps are huge for our youngest kids. The grade ones and twos missed the crucial last three months last year (when their learning typically all comes together for them) and their parents (for the most part) did not work with them at home. I've worked harder than ever to try to catch them up, with extra literacy blocks in the day, but some are still quite far behind. What is needed is more money for more support from LA and ELL teachers, who are doing the best they can but need more time.

Also, the gap for children with speech/language challenges is concerning as they receive very little support from the district. I have three in my class who really need support - only one is getting any.

And the psych ed assessments were not completed last year, so we have even more children who need to be tested. One was in the process of being assessed last spring, so that didn't get completed until fall, which meant that instead of the two assessments we were allotted this year, only one got done. We have many on the wait list who would benefit from assessment.

Major issues with mental health and cell phone addiction have come to the forefront. As far as gaps we have been told that all grade 8s will advance to grade 9 regardless of outcomes in their grade 8 courses. That means that students that have not attended any form of schooling at all this year will still be with their peers when they return but will have over a year gap in progress that will only set them up for failure in the future. I think it will take several years to overcome the gap.

I think there will be learning gaps, from just the students covering less curriculum and from the stress the pandemic has had on them. I think there has to be more compassion towards students, an acceptance that it's okay to not get through all the curriculum, a focus on connection/support for students, and a need to adapt classes and curriculum as needed for students.

we've seen and heard a lot of different stories in our much-expanded DL world this year.

Some students have thrived, others have done moderately well, and some are not doing well at all.

When we passed the half-way point of the year, there was a huge demand for Grade 8s and 9s from the regular high schools to take one course with us (note: we've always had a lot of Grade 10 - 12s taking courses as cross-enrolled students), as they had failed in the regular system. This was not because the teachers at the school weren't giving it their "all" - I really think it's primarily **because of the quarter system**. In general, students in high schools find this difficult to manage. I understand why it was put in place, but I don't see it as effective; there are added stresses to teachers and students because of the pace required to complete everything in such a short time frame. When anyone misses a day or two, it's a huge deal.

I think one of the best things that could happen for students and teachers this fall would be a return to a semester system. Everyone in our high schools, both staff and students, would benefit from this.

French Immersion kids are behind in reading/speaking.

Even without the pandemic every single classroom in the district would have a wide ranging set of students at varying academic levels in their classrooms. Pre-pandemic it would be commonplace to find a regular mainstream grade 4/5 classroom with abilities ranging in the grade 3-7 range in actual academic capability. With the pandemic I have observed this concern greatly exacerbated in that the students who had support at home would have continued to develop and extend the 'gap' between themselves and their peers who may not have had access to any meaningful supports from their homes. As a result, the 'gap' in classrooms in my view is two-fold: 1. The existing gap between the high achievers and their peers has increased and 2. the number of students in every class not meeting minimum grade/age level expectations has also increased. The ideal path forward is to hire more support teachers in EVERY school so they can address the needs of the students who are not meeting grade/age expectations while the regular classroom teachers do their best to deliver the regular curriculum (to expect any teacher to do both of these jobs – teach the regular curriculum to grade level students and close the gap for those not meeting expectations – is setting up the teacher, parent(s), and students for failure before they even have a chance). Further to this, I am not speaking of 1 additional support teacher or a part-time teacher – there needs to be SIGNIFICANT investment into the system. 1 additional teacher to support hundreds of students in a single large elementary school for example would be utterly useless in attempting to meaningfully address any 'gaps' caused by the pandemic.

There needs to be more assistance in the classroom. There needs to be LA support for kids that are needing it. Right now there isn't anyone who comes in regularly. These teachers get pulled to go teach in a classroom and then there is no support help.

#5 In high school the stakes are higher and timelines are shorter to correct course before students age out of public education and supports. Could you please also provide additional detail on supports you see as being needed in this area.

Advocate to move back to the semester system for next year instead of staying on a quarter system. You lose work time on the quarter system and therefore time that students have to process and work on the information they learn each day.

Any corrections that need to be made in mathematics learning due to the pandemic can only happen with more time in the classroom. Missed time is exactly that missed. If you want to correct for it more time is necessary. Just like math 8 is year long maybe other foundational math courses (math 9) need a longer timeline to correct for pandemic learning.

Perhaps the addition of some bridging courses in core subjects for students with large gaps in learning will be necessary.

Same ideas similar to what I already wrote for above question. I think some students may need supports to either take a class via the in-school Alt Ed classes(self-paced curriculum) if they are short credits. Otherwise they may have to take a class by distance education (EBUS or CIDES), or they may have to upgrade once they graduate (if they have credits to graduate, but still need a class for a post-secondary program). Providing resources for upgrading when in high school and knowing that's an option may relieve some stress for Grade 12's.

For students already at-risk of not graduating though (poor attendance, poor academic record), I think there needs to be a push for supports to motivate the students and families to attend and complete coursework. Or if they don't come to school, to then sign up for distance ed. I find schools and teachers do everything they can to help the students at risk of not graduating, but so many of them do not come to school, parents do not push them to attend, and they don't push themselves to complete coursework. They just don't seem to care, and don't realize the negative aspects of not-graduating school. It always strange to me the number of students - even at Grade 8 level that don't come to school and are just at home - and not even doing distance ed to complete coursework. Once you get behind at the junior level, they seem to be always behind from then on and are at risk of not graduating.

Another issue is - the government needs to give students another option beside just the regular dogwood. Not all students can acquire all those courses or credits. So offer another option - if it's going to be the "Adult Dogwood", then lower the age to 16, so that there is another attainable options for graduating students. By the time they're 16, you usually know if they are heading to the Adult or Regular dogwood path. But due to the age restriction and the fact that technically they shouldn't start an Adult Dogwood til after 18... and some won't even turn 18 til after school had ended in June of their Grade 12 year, it is a complicated option for many kids. So another graduation option is needed.

I would fundamentally disagree with the statement that the 'stakes are higher' for high school. Students in senior secondary have had supports and access to resources for a minimum of 10-12 years whereas students in elementary have, in some cases, access of less than a year or two to available supports and will continue on in an underfunded system for the

rest of their school age lives. Nevertheless, no teacher wants to be 'pitted' against their secondary counterparts. There needs to be more investment at both the ministry and the district level for classroom supports. Our district commonly staffs schools to the 'minimum' level as required by the provincial/district agreements. Pre-pandemic we routinely heard about district surpluses year after year – why isn't every cent of money available to the district spent on the students in this district? Why is there money kept aside that students will never benefit from? The fact that the ministry funding formula puts pressure on the individual school districts to keep 'surpluses' of money that are never used to support students is a fundamental flaw in the way education in BC is structured. More courses could be offered at the secondary level with extra teachers hired – there could be 'X' and 'Y' blocks (classes before/after regular day begins) added to timetables to give students access to courses that were cancelled by the district due to the pandemic semester system changes. Summer school course selections could be bolstered with a greater investment for students motivated to add to their transcripts.

Support should begin in elementary school and continue throughout. It is shameful that we continue to have a backlog of students waiting for ed psych assessments. Some students aren't even assessed for the first time until their Grade 7 year transitioning into high school. It is also frustrating that students who will have extra LA blocks or alternate programming in high school aren't offered these same supports in elementary. They are expected to be accommodated in classrooms with the same numbers of students.