

NBTA Council Day 101: Rights, Responsibilities and Alternate Proposals

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

What are NBTA Council Days?

There are three days in the school calendar that have been bargained for and are defined in the Collective Agreement as NBTA Council Days. On these days, the employer agrees to pay teachers to embark on professional learning opportunities on topics that they identify as meaningful and useful to them as they support learning of our students.

The NBTA is responsible for organizing and funding the content of these days of professional learning organized “by teachers, for teachers”.

August Council Days

Two of these days take place in late August - the responsibility for the organization of those days are placed with the NBTA Branch PL Committee who generally assigns at least one of the days to become a school-based professional learning day with the School PL Committee being responsible for planning the activities in connection with their school’s improvement efforts.

May Council Day Conference

The remaining day occurs annually on the first Friday in May. This day is special in that it is the **only** day in the school calendar when it is guaranteed that teachers have the right to define their own professional learning. The organization of this May Council Day is a mammoth task completed annually by our three Councils (Elementary, Middle Level and High School) who recruit 36 dedicated teacher volunteers to serve on their three Executive Councils. These teachers work tirelessly throughout the year to make sure that a quality program is offered.

New Council Day Plan Form for 2016!

Beginning in 2016, all teachers are asked to complete the new ‘Council Day Plan’ form. Those attending one of the Council Day programs will simply check the appropriate box in the first section of the form.

Those unable to travel to one of our Council Day programs, should consider the alternate proposal guidelines and describe their learning plan for the day in the space provided in the second section of the form. Once forms are completed and signed they should be submitted to the local School-Based PL Committees for approval, as well as to keep a record of where each teacher plans to be on Council Day at the school, should that information be required.

So what if you would like to attend a ‘different’ level’s Council Day?

Even though our Councils organize themselves by level and create programs accordingly, *ANY teacher member is free to register for ANY one of the Council Day programs and should be encouraged to register accordingly in order to honour their own professional learning plans and interests.*

What if you are unable to attend one of the May Council Day programs?

Over the course of a career, it is understandable that there may be some years that it is difficult or impossible for a teacher to travel away from home for their professional learning on Council Day. For this reason, a policy was created to allow individual teachers to submit an alternate proposal for approval by their school-based professional learning committee at least 4 weeks prior to the May Conference.

What is the most important factor considered in the approval of alternate learning plans?

- You must outline your **individual** plan for a LEARNING goal for the day. This is the only day that teachers get to be selfish about their learning and do something just for themselves rather than their team, school or district – although we know all will benefit from the learning experience.
- It is your learning that is the work, rather than the multitude of other “to do’s” related to your employment.
- It is not expected that a teacher would submit an alternate proposal for every year of their career.

I am a day-to-day supply teacher – can I attend?

Just like regular teachers, our casual members are encouraged to register and attend whichever program appeals to them. Our annual Council Day Conference is a benefit of membership for all NBTA members. If you are a casual member who is serving in a long-term supply position your attendance at Council Day is expected, as our employer will compensate you for the day.

Yikes! I must be absent from work on Council Day (or a portion thereof), what do I do?

If it happens that an individual must be absent from work on Council Day or any portion thereof, they are expected to treat the day as though it were any other school day by notifying their principal and filling in the appropriate documentation with their District Office.

May I Recommend:

Share your Learning!

(Great Staff/Team Meeting Activity following our May Council Day) Shortly after Council Day, it is intended that teachers have the opportunity to share something they learned on our May Council Day, regardless of the location or format. Place 'Council Day Share Shop' as a short 5-minute agenda item at a staff or team meeting. Ask each teacher to turn to a shoulder partner and answer the question "How was your May Council Day?" with one of the following three options:

- I attended one of the NBTA Council Day Programs and learned....
- I embarked on an individual learning plan as a result of my approved alternate proposal and learned....
- I was absent from work that day and have filled in appropriate documentation.

Activities such as this allow us to share and celebrate the learning that we have found particularly meaningful, as well as reinforce the collective responsibility for our profession to honour our Council Day rights and responsibilities.

It is important to be mindful that these rights and responsibilities have been negotiated over time, in good faith and in partnership with our employer.

It is the responsibility of all parties to honour the positive intentions that were foundational in achieving the right we enjoy of having three days of professional learning, that are planned by teachers, for teachers, in service to our students.

Ardith

As I marvel at the teachers in my own who hometown take on the additional challenge of welcoming refugee children to their classrooms with relatively little support, I was drawn to the article "Welcoming Refugees Into Your Classroom" from TEACH magazine by Meagan Gillmore. The author interviews experts on best practices as well as teachers who have been refugees themselves for advice. I particularly appreciated the reminder from Kristina Montero, education professor at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario - "Teachers need to be reassured that they have a lot of really great skills and knowledge about how to work with students."

"Effective strategies for teaching refugees work for all students. Everyone benefits from calm, structured environments and regular routines. All new students need a buddy to show them the school and play with them at recess—whether moving across school boards or the globe."

"A safe space for refugee students is a safe space for everybody," explains Montero. "It's not a detriment for anyone else." (Available online at: <http://www.teachmag.com/archives/8880>)

The Spring issue of *Education Canada* includes an interview with Dr. Stuart Shanker titled "Self-Regulation Update" (available online at: <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/self-regulation-update>). In this update, Shanker suggests that it is important for teachers to approach their job with the conviction that if a child is having trouble learning, then there is some stress going on, and that is changeable.

Want to know more? The MEHRIT Centre (TMC) website (www.self-reg.ca) has lots information and learning resources about self-regulation and the Shanker Self-Reg Method, including:

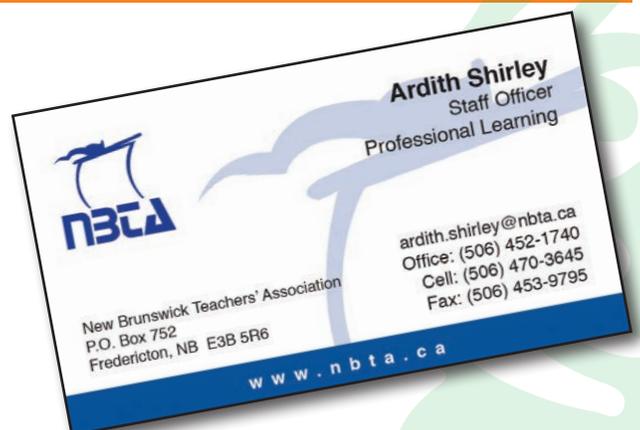
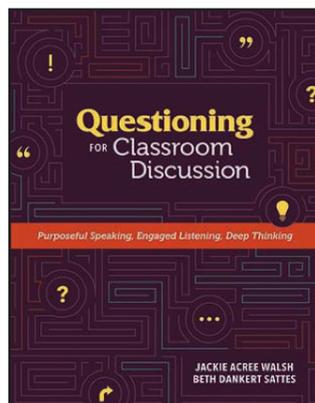
- a Knowledge Series (short printable articles that can be used as hand-outs)
- online courses and webinars
- an online Self-Reg community called Peersite

OR you could plan to attend our Elementary Council Day Program and hear Dr. Shanker in person!

Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Catherine Stephenson of Florenceville Elementary who was the winner of our February Book Give Away!

Our next draw will be for *Questions for Classroom Discussion* by Jackie Acree Walsh and Beth Dankert Sattes. Sound interesting? Drop me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with the subject line "Book Draw".



Closing Quotes:

"If we get public education right , everything else will follow. If we get it wrong, not much else will matter."

— Steve Kagen, M.D.