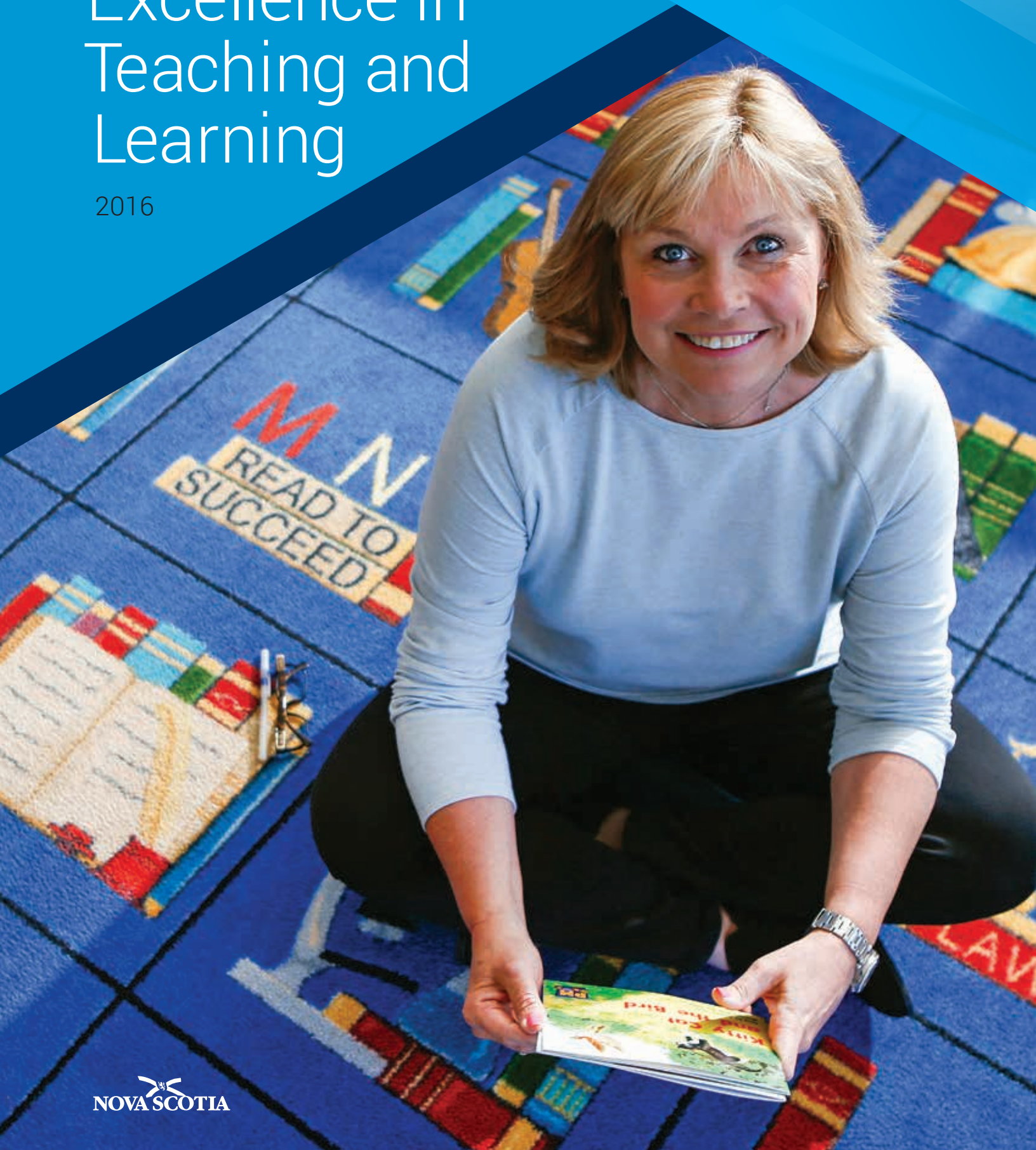


Nova Scotia Teaching Standards  
Foundation Document

# Excellence in Teaching and Learning

2016



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# Section One: Introduction

## Foreword

“Teachers are not simply at the heart of public education – they *are* its heart.”  
(Stevenson & Gilliland, 2016)

Canada is a world leader in public education, a proud reality confirmed by many different indicators of success. On recent international assessments, Canada ranked sixth overall and was the highest English-speaking and French-speaking ranking nation in the world (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Among the provinces, Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec are generally the leaders, with Nova Scotia in the mid-to-low range of provincial rankings.

We want to change that. Nova Scotia was a leader in public education in Canada, and we want to be leaders once again. To do that, we need to make a good system even better, and our dedicated teachers are the key.

As Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) point out, teachers are the real change agents in education. They are not just implementers of change: they generate it. Within schools, teaching has the strongest impact on student achievement. We are introducing teaching standards to help teachers define their work and to support them in their commitment to provide the best education possible for their students.

The standards are designed to help teachers:

- affirm the excellent work that they do with students every day;
- reflect on their individual teaching practice;
- identify and address professional learning needs;
- collaborate with colleagues in their daily work;
- innovate in the use of new teaching strategies; and
- provide high quality teaching.

# Background

On January 29, 2015, the Honorable Karen Casey, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, released a five-year plan for renewing, refocusing, and rebuilding public education in Nova Scotia. Entitled *'The 3Rs: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education 2015'*, the Action Plan was based upon the first comprehensive review of the Nova Scotia school system in over 25 years. This 2014 review was led by a panel chaired by former Nova Scotia Lieutenant Governor Myra Freeman. The panel heard from over 19,000 Nova Scotians in the course of their deliberations and produced a report entitled *Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student* (2014). Overall, Nova Scotians showed their appreciation for the hard-working and caring staff who work in our schools; and they also identified key strategies for advancing high-quality teaching and learning in every classroom.

In response to the public's call for high-quality teaching and learning across the province, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recommended the development of teaching standards. In essence, teaching standards describe a shared vision of professional practice and high quality teaching, informed by teachers, education partners, theory and research. Teaching standards provide a common framework that describes what teachers should know and be able to do, from initial certification

and throughout all stages of their careers, as they support student learning. This consistent framework guides professional learning at the school, school board and university levels. The standards also serve as the foundation for important changes to our education system, including a new model of teacher education, redesigned Bachelor of Education programs, accreditation of the university schools of education, and new professional development programs for teachers.

## Teaching Standards and the Action Plan for Education

**Pillar One:**

Modern Education System

**Pillar Two:**

Innovative Curriculum

**Pillar Three:**

Inclusive School Environments

**Pillar Four:**

Excellence in Teaching and Leadership

## Teaching Standards and the Action Plan

During the education review, Nova Scotians identified the highly competent and dedicated staff working in public schools as the number one asset in the education system. In keeping with this key finding, the Action Plan contains a variety of actions designed to affirm and support excellence in teaching. The teaching standards support all four pillars of the Action Plan, and are strongly linked to Pillar Four – Excellence in Teaching and Leadership. By defining and promoting consistent, high-quality teaching, the standards support the achievement of the overarching goals of the Action Plan: increased student achievement in math and literacy, and increased student career-readiness.



# Section Two: Foundations

## Process for Developing the Teaching Standards

- Input from Teachers, School Administrators, and Education Partners
- Review of Research and Professional Literature
- Findings from Provincial Reports
- Findings from International Reports
- Comparison of Education Systems

## Process for Developing the Teaching Standards

Nova Scotia's teaching standards are based on extensive consultation, a review of current research and professional literature, analysis of education reports, and comparison of different models of teaching standards in other education systems. The groundwork for the teaching standards was laid over a year of study and consultation, under the leadership of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (department) staff. As the various sources of information were reviewed, common findings emerged that described a focused and cohesive framework that supports excellence in teaching and student achievement.



## Input from Teachers, School Administrators, and Education Partners

The voices of teachers were paramount in the development of the teaching standards. A consultative process was used, involving more than 300 participants who met at various sites across the province. Teachers and school-based administrators worked alongside other partners in education at consultation sessions held in each school board and at the department (see Appendix A). The partners represented at these sessions included the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Nova Scotia School Boards Association, Educational Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia Ltd., school advisory councils, Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey staff, African Nova Scotian educators, university schools of education, elected school board members, school board senior administration, early childhood educators and faculty. This process was designed to produce teaching standards that were collaboratively developed, responsive to the partners in public education, and framed within the Nova Scotia context.

The collaborative process for the province's first teaching standards was based on a common commitment to:

- provide teachers with a consistent framework for their professional practice;
- represent recurrent themes identified through broad consultation with education partners;
- meet provincial legislative, contractual and ethical requirements for teachers;
- promote the use of evidence-based teaching practices that meet the needs of all students and have the most impact on student achievement; and
- reflect the vision, mission and values that shape the provincial education system.

## Review of the Research and Professional Literature

Selected research and professional literature in effective teaching, teaching standards, educational leadership, high impact instructional strategies, school improvement, teacher education, professional learning and educational reform was reviewed. Findings were analyzed and compared to identify common features of high performing education systems, as well as successful approaches to large-scale educational reform. The bibliography in Appendix B provides a complete list of the references consulted during the development of the teaching standards.

Overall, the research and professional literature reviewed pointed to the importance of teaching quality in student achievement and success. As well, the central role of positive and respectful relationships at all levels of the education system emerged as a recurrent theme. These relationships included student-teacher interactions, as well as collaboration between educators, families, and communities. A related factor associated with student success was teacher expectations. In particular, high expectations for all students were identified as important to student learning. Thus, teacher values and beliefs, while not always observable or measurable, were found to exert a significant influence in education. This was one of the general patterns that emerged in the research and professional literature listed at the end of this document.

## Findings from Provincial Reports

In addition to Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education (2015), a number of pertinent provincial studies and reports were referenced. Key findings and recommendations from each report established a context for Nova Scotia's Teaching Standards.

- *Report and Recommendations of the Education Professional Development Committee* (September, 2009) proposed models of professional learning that have the most impact on student learning, including those for school leaders.
- *BLAC Report on Education: Redressing Inequity - Empowering Black Learners* (1994) presents a vision for quality education for all Black learners in Nova Scotia.



- *Work on Examining High Quality Teacher Attributes and Core Instructional Practices* (2013–14) reviewed research on high impact instructional strategies used by effective teachers that yield the greatest results in student achievement.
- *Reality Check: A Review of Key Program areas in the BLAC Report for their effectiveness in enhancing the educational opportunities and achievement of African Nova Scotia learners* (November, 2009) examined the effectiveness of selected programs and initiatives that grew out of the *BLAC Report* (1994) and builds on the recommendations made by previous reviews regarding human resources and professional development for culturally-responsive teaching.
- *Building Capacity in Our Schools and Classrooms: The Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Program, Educational Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia Ltd.* (February, 2010) defines standards for instructional leaders based on research and broad consultation, which guided the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the Instructional Leadership Program.
- *Aligning Teacher Qualifications with the Learning Needs of Nova Scotia Students – Report and Recommendations of the Partners’ Working Group* (August, 2013) presented research on the impact of teachers assigned to their field of expertise versus “out of field” assignments, and included recommended supports for teachers in “out of field” teaching assignments.
- *Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians* (February, 2014), commonly known as the Ivany Report, was a landmark document that outlined a plan for increased economic growth and sustainability for Nova Scotia. The Action Plan for Education is embedded within the broad strategic framework outlined in this report. The Ivany Report includes recommendations for achieving economic goals through the promotion of 21st century learning skills, entrepreneurial skills, enhanced literacy and numeracy, and more responsive educational programming for diverse populations. These key recommendations are reflected in the Action Plan and were considered when developing the teaching standards.

Each of these provincial reports provides insights into the Nova Scotia education system, and recommendations for improvements that were considered in the development of the teaching standards.

## Findings from International Reports

Over the past twenty years, knowledge has grown about the features of successful school systems around the world. Much can be learned from high performing jurisdictions where student achievement in math, literacy and science is strong. In particular, important insights can be gained from other education systems that are undergoing educational reforms in pursuit of improved student achievement. Studies of large-scale school reform are often prepared by international organizations that have adopted a leadership role in education. Several of these reports were consulted in the development of Nova Scotia’s teaching standards.

Major reports on teaching and leadership standards by international organizations were studied. For example, the report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education (CEPPE) entitled *Learning Standards, Teaching Standards and Standards for School Principals: A Comparative Study* (2013) was examined. Against the backdrop of the widespread use of national and international testing and comparison of student performance, this report described and compared the standards for teaching, learning and leadership in seventeen countries. Similarly, the McKinsey and Company Report, *How the World’s Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (Barbour & Moursed, 2007), presented the approaches used by the school systems with the top ten results on the OECD’s *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA). Building on these findings, the Moursed, Chinezi and Barber (2010) McKinsey and Company Report, *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, provided further insights into how education systems can build and sustain improvement. These international reports served as catalysts for the development and introduction of Nova Scotia’s first teaching standards.

## Comparison of Education Systems

The development of *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards* was also informed by a comprehensive inquiry into the teaching standards and best practices utilized in multiple education systems. The purpose of the comparison was to identify: a) the recurrent themes in education systems with consistently strong student performance; and b) varied approaches to the development and implementation of teaching standards. Many systems were in the midst of large-scale reform, often in response to student performance on international assessments. The systems varied with regard to teaching standards, levels of student performance, and supportive structures for teaching. The comparison found that some jurisdictions displayed strong student performance in the presence of clearly defined teaching standards. Other systems displayed strong student performance in the absence of clearly defined teaching standards, but in the presence of other supportive structures for high quality teaching. Overall, teaching standards were found to be most effective as one component of focused and cohesive education systems which supported high quality teaching in a coordinated way.

The domestic and international education systems that were compared included:

- Alberta
- Australia
- British Columbia
- Finland
- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Massachusetts
- New Zealand
- Ontario
- Quebec
- Shanghai-China
- Singapore
- South Korea
- United Kingdom
- United States:  
(Interstate Teacher  
Assessment and  
Support Consortium)

The comparison identified recurrent themes and patterns of teaching standards and related indicators in a wide range of education systems. In addition, the comparison highlighted the central role of focused and cohesive education systems in generating, sustaining, and enhancing teaching standards as a supportive framework for high quality teaching. In these systems, the teaching standards were aligned with other core components including curricula, school improvement planning, teacher education, teacher certification, strong leadership, teacher induction and professional learning. The comparison of education systems and the reviews of research, professional literature, provincial reports, and international reports all pointed to the same overall finding: teaching standards are most effective when they are one component of a focused and cohesive education system. The importance of this systemic coordination cannot be overstated, particularly with regard to progressive and innovative supports for high quality teaching. In Nova Scotia, the *Action Plan for Education* provides a blueprint for a focused and cohesive education system that supports high quality teaching and student success.

## Focused and Cohesive Education Systems

- Commitment to Excellence in Teaching
- Rigorous Teacher Education
- Progressive Professional Learning
- Effective Personnel Management
- Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
- Strong Leadership

## Focused and Cohesive Education Systems

The input and information reviewed in the development of the teaching standards pointed to education systems that provide a range of integrated, supportive structures for teachers. While teaching standards provide a common, clear vision of high quality teaching, other components also serve significant functions.

## Commitment to Excellence in Teaching

The priority placed on high quality teaching is supported by strong evidence in the research and professional literature. Research findings confirm that teaching quality has the most influence on student achievement, greater than other contributing factors from the home, student, and school (Marzano, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Therefore, the goal of many education systems is to have high-quality teachers in every classroom (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The challenge is to provide consistent high-quality teaching across an entire system. Meeting this challenge entails selecting the right people to become teachers, and supporting their development into highly effective instructors at all stages of their careers. (Goodwin, 2011). In Nova Scotia, we are committed to promoting excellence in teaching in a coordinated, collaborative and systematic way.

## Rigorous Teacher Education

Teacher education lays the foundation for excellence in teaching. The common features of teacher education programs in top performing education systems include:

- the attraction of strong candidates to teacher education programs based on rigorous academic and non-academic selection criteria;
- established accreditation standards for teacher education programs that are aligned with teaching standards;
- exemplary models of teacher education based on well-defined teaching standards that guide course work and teaching practicums; and
- effective processes for monitoring the quality of teacher education programs at all phases of a student teacher's development and post-graduate performance.

In the provincial report entitled *'Aligning Teacher Qualifications with the Learning Needs of Nova Scotia Students – Report and Recommendations of the Partners' Working Group* (August, 2013), ongoing interaction and cooperation among universities, school boards and the Department was recommended. This recommendation was made to ensure that the most recent information on curriculum, assessment, teaching strategies and provincial initiatives are embedded in Bachelor of Education programs. This collaboration facilitates the alignment of provincial, school board, school and student needs with teacher preparation.

## Progressive Professional Learning

Professional learning is a continuum of activities that expand teachers' knowledge of how students learn, what to teach, and how to teach it. Teaching standards foster ongoing professional learning that assists teachers in meeting students' changing needs. Research, reports and professional literature, including the report of the *Nova Scotia Education Professional Development Committee* (2009), highlight the impact of high-quality professional learning on student achievement. Professional learning that yields the greatest results has been shown to be:

- focused on improvements in student achievement;
- aligned with teaching standards;
- responsive to teachers' identified learning needs and the learning needs of students;
- connected to teachers' daily work;
- based on a collaborative, shared vision of improving learning for all students;
- supported by follow-up, including coaching and mentoring;
- informed by student assessment;
- grounded in research and data-informed decisions;
- supported by resources; and
- linked to teachers' professional growth plans.

## Effective Personnel Management

A teacher's first year in the classroom is one of the most important. Newly hired teachers who receive coordinated support through induction and mentoring programs have a solid foundation on which to build their professional practice. Teachers who make a strong start are much more likely to become and remain strong educators over time (Boogren, 2015). Features of induction and mentoring programs for newly hired teachers include:

- personalized goals and collaboration between the newly hired teacher and mentor;
- opportunities for the newly hired teacher to observe their colleagues;
- time for professional conversations, feedback and reflection on teaching practice;
- access to professional learning opportunities and appropriate resources; and
- opportunities to demonstrate progress within the teaching standards framework.

In addition to underpinning supports for newly hired teachers, the *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards* will be foundational in the design of a provincial performance management system. This system will include a performance appraisal template for all teachers, and training in the use of the template for instructional leaders. The provincial performance management system and appraisal template will:

- describe the professional expectations of teachers in all aspects of their practice, as defined by the teaching standards;
- recognize and affirm excellence in teaching;
- inform teaching practice and encourage professional growth;
- encourage the self-identification of professional learning needs;

- provide guidance in the selection and completion of professional learning activities;
- provide timely feedback and intervention to teachers as they hone their skills;
- monitor teachers' progress throughout their careers; and
- inform collaborative planning for professional learning among education partners.

## Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

With a guaranteed and viable curriculum, students are given an equitable opportunity to learn the content that is expected of them, and teachers are provided with adequate instructional time to deliver the intended curriculum. A guaranteed and viable curriculum provides all students with equitable learning opportunities that are characterized by:

- universal student access to an equitable education, regardless of race, culture, language, socioeconomic status, gender or geographic location;
- curricula that allows for the integration of ethnic and cultural content;
- learning resources that reflect diverse students, families and communities;
- universal student access to educational resources and technologies that are required for student learning and success;
- a streamlined curriculum focused on essential learning outcomes and supported by high-quality teaching; and
- consistent delivery of the intended curriculum by highly skilled educators.

## Strong Leadership

The research suggests that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learning (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Placing a well-trained principal in every school has become a priority within many focused and cohesive education systems. In addition, the definitions of school leadership have been broadened to include vice-principals, teacher leaders, aspiring leaders and district leaders. Leadership standards reflect the increased role of leaders in the promotion of equitable and inclusive teaching, research-based instructional strategies, and distributed or shared models of leadership. As evidenced in the literature, (e.g. Blase, Blase, & Phillips, 2010; Educational Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia, 2015; Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2015; Taylor, 2010), strong leadership:

- facilitates school cultures that support opportunities for student learning, teachers leadership, and staff professional growth;
- includes teachers in decision-making about instruction, the allocation of resources, and ongoing professional learning;
- provides guidance in the use of student assessment data for classroom programming and school improvement;
- promotes change that will result in instructional improvement;
- models integrity, fairness and ethical conduct;
- advances the success of all students by collaborating with parents and community members; and
- leads the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

In addition to serving as the framework for high-quality teaching in Nova Scotia, the teaching standards will serve as the springboard for the development of leadership standards. As the Nova Scotia Teaching Standards are introduced, work will begin on the development of leadership standards. The combined framework of teaching and leadership standards will support the successful completion of many actions in the Action Plan, and help build the new vision of public education for Nova Scotia.



# Conclusion

All of the information gathered in the development phase was reviewed and consolidated to shape the teaching standards, including the design of indicators for each standard. Examinations of multiple systems identified structures that support excellence in teaching and student learning. The coordination of these structures is integral to successful implementation of teaching standards, with the aim of providing every student with access to high quality teaching. In addition to coordination, ongoing input and adjustments will be required as the teaching standards evolve to keep pace with changes in education. The teaching standards and indicators will be continuously refined to support excellence in teaching and learning.



# Appendix A

## Partners

Leading the Work for Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: Centre for Learning Excellence

Partners involved in development of Teaching Standards included representatives from the following groups:

- 1) Teachers
- 2) School-based Administrators
- 3) Nova Scotia Teachers Union – Provincial and regional representatives on Teaching Standards
- 4) Regional School Board Staff
- 5) First Nations - Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
- 6) Senior Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development staff
- 7) Nova Scotia School Board Association
- 8) Educational Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia Ltd.
- 9) Early Childhood Educators
- 10) Faculty from Early Childhood Training Institutions
- 11) School Advisory Councils
- 12) Elected School Boards
- 13) University Schools of Education

## Chronology of Consultations

(Nova Scotia Teachers' Union Representatives attended Provincial and Regional consultation sessions.)

Date		Session
1	May 1, 2015	Research began on development of teaching standards
2	Oct./Nov., 2015	Presentations to NSTU Curriculum Committee and senior school board staff
3	Dec. 9, 2015	Education Partners Group Session
4	Dec. 10, 2015	Presentation to staff officers of the NSTU
5	Jan. 12, 2016	Provincial Consultation session of Teachers from Each Board
6	Jan. 20, 2016	Provincial Consultation session of School Based Administrators from Each Board
7	Feb. 11, 2016	Halifax Regional School Board Consultation Session
8	Feb. 17, 2016	Annapolis Valley Regional School Board Consultation Session
9	Feb. 19, 2016	Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board Consultation Session
10	Feb. 23, 2016	Strait Regional School Board Consultation Session
11	Feb. 29, 2016	South Shore Regional School Board Consultation Session
12	Mar. 2, 2016	Tri-County Regional School Board Consultation Session
13	Mar. 10, 2016	Chignecto-Central Regional School Board Consultation Session
14	Mar. 22, 2016	Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial Consultation Session
15	Apr. 15, 2016	Reconvened teachers from January 12 session to review the feedback collected at all regional sessions
16	Apr. 19, 2016	Reconvened school based administrators from January 20 session to review the feedback collected at all regional sessions
17	Apr. 22, 2016	Update to NSTU Curriculum Committee
17	Apr. 26, 2016	Reconvened Education Partners Group from December 9 session to review the feedback collected at all regional sessions

# Appendix B

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