

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How many non-instructional days are there?

The School Act Regulation allows for a maximum of six non-instructional days (NIDs) per year in the school calendar. This does not include the last day of June, which is designated as an "administrative day."

Where did these days come from?

Until 1972, there was only one day in the school calendar for classrooms to be closed so that teachers could be away to participate in conventions and workshops.

In 1972, non-instructional days were added to the school calendar at the request of the teaching profession after years of advocacy by the BCTF. The inclusion increased the number of days of work for teachers with no loss of instructional days for students. Starting in September 1973, there were five non-instructional days in the school calendar.

In the early 1990s, the ministry allowed school districts to designate up to two School Community Interaction Days (SCIDs) in addition to the five NIDs. The standard calendar attached to the 1993 regulation set out two SCIDs for each of the 1993–94, 1994–95, and 1995–96 school years. The impetus for the addition of these days was the implementation of Year 2000 initiatives.

In May 1996, the ministry introduced legislation establishing an Implementation Planning Day. This sixth non-instructional day replaced the two School Community Interaction Days (SCIDs) that existed until June 30, 1996.

How can these days be used?

The ministry has changed the list of allowable activities for non-instructional days over the years. The current list of purposes in the School Act Regulation is:

- professional development
- parent-teacher community conferences on educational matters
- school planning, preparation of student progress reports or teacher education related to new curriculum or to educational change
- parent-teacher interviews, including interviews in which the student is present or participates
- a purpose designated by the minister.

The minister only designates the purpose for one of the days, the sixth NID. The designation is done through a Ministerial Order that is revised from time to time. In the past, the designation has included purposes such as activities relating to the implementation of new assessment, evaluation and reporting policies, the implementation of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs), accreditation, school

planning, student safety, interpretation of Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results, Aboriginal education, and special education, etc.

The current Ministerial Order 122/93, the Designation of Purpose for Non-Instructional Day Order, requires school boards to schedule one NID in the 2007–08 school year for the purpose of “facilitating activities that in the board’s opinion are designed to enhance student achievement, with particular focus on literacy.”

What control do teachers and their locals have over these days?

During the years of local bargaining, most locals of the BCTF were successful in achieving contract provisions regarding the five NIDs that existed at that time. In general, the contractual provisions designate some or all of these as professional development days, and provide for school and/or local PD committees to determine and plan the activities for these PD days. Sometimes these clauses specify a provincial PD day, a district day, a certain number of school-based days, etc. A related provision of local agreements provides most local PD committees with control over the allocation of PD funding for teachers.

Only a few locals have contractual provisions that give them some input into the sixth NID.

Since the government mandated provincial bargaining, locals have not been able to bargain improvements in PD clause language in local collective agreements to deal with new issues and circumstances. However, locals can sometimes get improvements in local practice through other methods.

What pressures are there to use NIDs for things other than PD?

If the five NIDs are not clearly designated as PD days in the local collective agreement or if these contract provisions are not carefully enforced, other activities will reduce the amount of time teachers have to engage in professional development activities. Locals and PD committees are finding that the two biggest sources of pressure on PD time and funding are activities related to implementation and accountability.

Implementation of provincial curricula and new ministry policies

The number of curricula, policies, and initiatives that the ministry and districts expect teachers to implement clearly exceed what can reasonably happen on the sixth NID each year. This has resulted in considerable pressure on the other five NIDs. A number of years ago, the ministry got out of the business of implementation and downloaded the task to school districts as another under-funded mandate.

The pressure on both PD time and PD funds comes directly from the district and school administrators, and indirectly from our own members. District and school administrators have been given the task of getting things implemented. They are typically not given the resources to accomplish this so they look to our PD time and PD funds. If members know they must implement a new curriculum and have been provided no other time or support, they will inevitably look to their PD time and money.

Work related to the accountability agenda

Again, there is typically more work generated by the district accountability contract process and district goals, and the school planning process and school goals than can reasonably fit into the sixth NID. District and school administrators argue that the district and school goals should become teachers' professional development goals. This argument confuses ongoing work and professional development. It also favours collegial work to the near exclusion of individual pursuits.

What strategies can be used to maintain teacher control of PD days?

Locals and PD committees have worked hard to resist the pressures on PD time and funding. In the interests of helping people not re-invent the wheel, here are the pros and cons of some of those strategies:

Making distinctions based on definitions

Some locals have tried to establish teacher control of PD by defining terms such as "in-service" and "staff development." This is problematic as these terms have broad meanings. For example, in-service is anything that occurs after a teacher has been hired. It is distinct from "pre-service" but not from "professional development." Similarly, staff development is anything that develops a staff. It could be professional development for the staff or not, it could be professional development for some teachers on staff and not others. The definition of professional development, its purposes, etc. in the *BCTF Members' Guide* (30.A.01–03, p 126) is very broad, and includes both individual and collective work.

Making distinctions based on who initiated the activity

Some locals have also tried to make distinctions between activities teachers choose and those that are "laid on." The problem is that under sufficient pressure from administrators or peers, or simply time, teachers will choose to do activities that would otherwise be clearly designated as "laid on." Also, some teachers will genuinely feel that an activity initiated by a school or district administrator would provide them with good professional development.

Making distinctions based on the type of NID

Some locals have tried to make sure that there is a common understanding about what days are for what purpose. They make sure that members and administrators alike know which NIDs are PD days in their local. The local collective agreement may specify that up to five NIDs are PD days. If the collective agreement is silent on this issue, there may be positive past practice that the local can rely on.

Locals can have their district identify which of the NIDs the school board is scheduling for the purpose designated in Ministerial Order M104/05, i.e., which is the sixth NID. The local can then communicate clearly to members how many PD days they have and which day is the sixth NID. This may help confine activities related to the district accountability contract, school planning, district or school goals, district or ministry initiatives, etc., to the sixth NID and keep other days free for professional development.

Helping members speak up

Members will be more likely to speak up if they have been encouraged to, if they know who to speak to, and if they are given "scripts" for common issues, such as teacher control of PD.

Breathing new life into PD

Members will value professional development and defend PD days if their experiences are positive and meaningful. Planning professional development activities is difficult and time-consuming work, and local PD chairs, and district and school PD committees need support in order to provide quality professional development services to members.

Many locals have built on the broad BCTF definition of professional development and explored new ways to do professional development. They have expanded their local PD offerings to include self-directed PD, action research groups, etc. The BCTF material on self-directed PD logs includes the attached list of possible professional learning experiences but there are many more.