



RIELITY CHECK

A publication of the Louis Riel Teachers' Association (www.lrta.ca)

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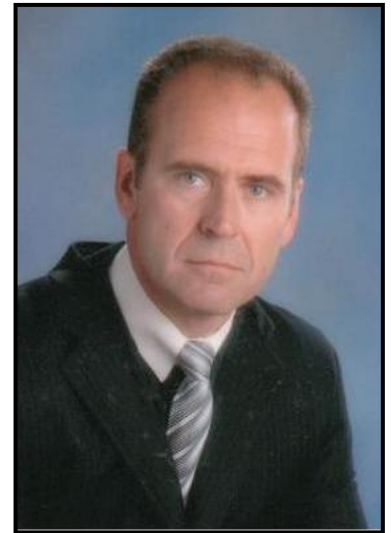
NOVEMBER 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President – Frank Restall

The Code of Professional Practice governs the conduct of teachers. Over the 90 plus years of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, teachers have shaped the Code's evolution and established the Code as a foundation upon which the Society is built. The Code specifies the "required standards of conduct for all members of The Manitoba Teachers' Society". Members must adhere to this standard in their dealings at work and outside of the school day.

Teachers, as professionals, are bound to the Code and the Code applies to members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. MTS members are held to a "higher standard" than many other workers and employee groups and this higher standard does indeed impact a member outside of the school day. Members are responsible to the Code and are held to this higher standard because "all teachers' professional behaviour must reflect the spirit as well as the letter of the Code".



The use of technology as a form of communication falls under the auspices of the Code of Professional Practice. The rapid expansion of social networking sites such as Facebook have brought some members into contravention of the Code and the high standard of conduct that is implied. MTS Staff Officer Bobbi Ethier has written an article that appears later in this Rielity Check that directly speaks to the hazards of such social networking sites. It is a must read for all members.

It has been said that one's Teaching Certificate and professional reputation are the two most important possessions of any member. Members may wish to protect themselves by engaging in the "management of one's on-line professional reputation". If members discover an on-line site that is damaging to one's professional reputation or the professional reputation of other members, please contact the Association office or the Society.

Further to technology, members are reminded that the Divisional email system (which is owned and can be monitored by the Division) is not intended for personal business. Please use outside email service providers for personal business and attend to it after the workday and outside of your worksite. As well, if a member wishes to email the LRTA office, ensure that any sensitive inquiries/questions are made from an outside email account on a personal computer.

Also included in this issue of the Rielity Check is an article on the LRTA Incident Report Form. The form is available on-line and in the staff room binder and should be completed whenever a physical or verbal attack or incident of harassment occurs (the LRTA Incident Report Form is not to be →



...PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued from page 1)

confused with the Division's Injury Report). Each time you submit the LRTA Incident Report Form to the Association office you are supporting your colleagues and the entire membership.

November 30th is fast approaching. If you are planning to resign at Christmas, this is the critical date. Termination of a contract may occur through written notice to the Division by November 30th for a December 31st termination.

November can be a hectic month for members. Schools are very busy – reporting, interviews, portfolio conferences, concerts looming and a myriad of other activities. Ensure that you are achieving a balance between the many demands upon your time and your own personal well being. Member wellness remains a top priority of the Association.

Take care of yourself and take care of each other!

Frank Restall

President, Louis Riel Teachers' Association

NEW LRTA EMAIL ADDRESSES

Effective immediately, the NEW email addresses for the LRTA are as follows:

President – Frank Restall preslrta@shaw.ca

Vice President Collective Bargaining – Barry Wittevrongel cblrta@shaw.ca

Vice President Professional Development – Bob Gaudes pdlrta@shaw.ca

Office Administrator – Lorrie Restall seclrta@shaw.ca

Please make the necessary changes to your contact list. The LRTA office phone number (929-5782) and fax number (929-5780) remain the same.



AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

Collective Bargaining – Barry Wittevrongel

In October, the LRTA Collective Bargaining Committee sought input from the membership in regard to bargaining priorities. This survey was conducted in order to have teachers provide information to help guide the committee. The response rate to the survey was very impressive!

The collective voice of the membership resonated with some very important bargaining issues. Some of the most frequently identified priorities (in no particular order) underlined concerns and issues that teachers need addressed.

Members are looking for a wage increase which keeps our members at the top of the salary scale among teachers in the city. Members expressed concern regarding class size, composition and hours of work. As well, teachers felt that safeguards dealing with technology implementation and harassment were important. Many of these concerns were also reflected in our wellness survey.

The Bargaining Committee would like to thank the membership for participating in the survey. Your feedback is valuable for it provides the Committee with guidance and clearly demonstrates the members' commitment to collective bargaining and to the Association.

LRTA INCIDENT REPORT FORM

President – Frank Restall

Of all the forms and papers you encounter as a member, one of the most important is the LRTA Incident Report Form. All LRTA members must complete this form whenever an attack or incident of harassment occurs. (The LRTA Incident Report Form is not to be confused with the Division's injury report although there are situations when a member would complete both.)

The LRTA Incident Report is to be filled out whenever abuse takes place. The person instigating the abuse may be a student, parent or colleague. The nature of the attack might be physical or verbal and can occur in many different ways. The Incident Report Form also allows the member to provide information regarding injury or damage to property.

Members should complete the form whenever an incident occurs. Members should not judge the severity of the incident nor should they simply grow accustomed to incidents because they occur frequently. Each incident of abuse is one too many!

The LRTA Incident Report Form is sent directly to the LRTA office and provides the Association with the means of tracking the number, type and severity of incidents that members deal with. The information collected is for statistical purposes. This is valuable information for the Association, especially for bargaining purposes and for communicating accurate descriptions of working conditions.

The LRTA Incident Report Form can be found in your staffroom binder or on-line at www.lrta.ca. Each time you submit a form you are supporting teachers in your school, in your Association and across the province!

For further information, members are encouraged to call the LRTA office at 929-5782.



TECHNOLOGIES PRESENT CHALLENGES

MTS Staff Officer, Teacher Welfare Department – Bobbi Éthier

The Manitoba Teachers' Society has been working with an increasing number of members who have found themselves in difficulty due to their uses of technology. The Society anticipates an influx of these cases until its membership becomes more aware of the ramifications of its actions.

Blogging is almost a norm among teachers. Many of their humorous blogs or online diaries have provided great fodder for staffroom kibitzing. Indeed, reading a blog about some else's struggles in teaching calculus or the interpretation of Shakespeare's soliloquies has been reaffirming to those in the trenches. However, like all good things, they have a dangerous side too as one Manitoba teacher found out.

This teacher was geographically isolated and maintained a blog as a means of survival in a very small and closed community. The intended audience was the teacher's friends and family in Winnipeg, but, as with everything on the web, it was accessible to anybody. When the blog was discovered by the students, the teacher's teaching community was not amused to see the personal anecdotes, satirical comments, and names of students and colleagues included in the blog. Given that there were over 400 entries in its entirety, the community, school, colleagues, students and their families could easily be identified. The employing Division felt that the teacher's musings on the blog were akin to being disloyal to the employer, a breach of the MTS Code of Professional Practice and a possible breach of both the Personal Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act. The teacher never dreamed in a million years that this would be the outcome of a personal online diary.

Facebook, the social networking site that enables people with common interests, associations, and affiliations to network with one another through the site, has proven to be another tool that can backfire. Originally designed for Harvard University students to connect with one another, the site has now expanded to the point where it is used by political parties, magazines, companies, universities, etc. as a place to promote their agendas. Since its creation, it has morphed into the largest free social networking site with over 500 million registered members' worldwide.

Two Manitoba cases have challenged the Society to examine the negative utilization of Facebook. One of our members was subjected to a great deal of ridicule on a Facebook site that required people who were participating in the online dialogue to sign in. The conversation that ensued about this teacher criticized his clothing, his interests, and alleged that he was engaged in very serious illegal behaviour. The Division and the Society were able to take swift and severe action against these irresponsible individuals because we knew their names and who they were from their Facebook profiles.

Many teachers have created their own Facebook profiles and are using it effectively to communicate with their students and community. Regrettably one teacher was astounded when her Facebook profile was poorly received by her employer (NOTE: Many employers now regularly peruse social networking sites). When creating the profile, you are asked to answer the following questions: relationship status, looking for ____, religious views, and political views. There is also a means of including photos and postings on a virtual wall. The employer was upset that the teacher had generously filled out all kinds of details answering the profile questions and then elaborated further in the postings. The teacher had also uploaded photos of herself with many students, unfortunately without their permission and the Division felt that it reflected poorly on them and on the teacher. →



...TECHNOLOGIES PRESENT CHALLENGES (continued from page 4)

Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and blogging have completely changed our communication, mostly in a positive way. The Society urges caution when using these seemingly private tools. **The absolute rule to live by is that you would be comfortable to have your Facebook and blog activities appear on the front page of the newspaper.** If you are not, then changes need to be made before it becomes an issue.



NewsRelease

October 21, 2010

PROVINCE ANNOUNCES NEW REGULATIONS TO PROTECT AGAINST PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT IN WORKPLACE

Employers Required to Ensure Workplaces are Respectful, Safe: Howard

Changes to the Workplace, Safety and Health Regulation will introduce new requirements to protect workers from psychological harassment in the workplace, Labour and Immigration Minister Jennifer Howard announced today.

“Manitoba now joins other provinces such as Ontario, Saskatchewan and Quebec in requiring employers to provide protection from such harassment,” Howard said. “This builds on other measures that protect workers from harassment based on age, race or gender and ensure that workplaces are respectful and safe for everyone.”

The amendments are the result of review and consensus by employer and labour representatives on the Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health. Recent studies have shown that about 40 per cent of the workforce has been subjected to harassment or bullying.

New provisions will address psychological harassment, such as intimidation, bullying and humiliation. Normal and reasonable management actions, including discipline, are not defined as psychological harassment.

Employers will be required to put in place measures to prevent harassment and address it if it occurs. Manitoba Labour and Immigration will help develop and implement policies and educate employers and employees on their responsibilities to ensure a respectful and healthy workplace.

Other technical changes respond to a recommendation made following the inquest into the 2000 death of a Manitoba worker at Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company and other issues identified by stakeholders. Amendments will provide clear direction to employers and workers on the steps necessary to eliminate or control workplace hazards, strengthen the requirements for the use of personal protective equipment and reflect updated standards, the minister said.

“I want to thank the members of the Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health for their thoughtful advice on these changes,” Howard said.

Employers and employees have until Feb. 1, 2011, to become familiar with and comply with updated requirements.



WHAT'S WRONG AT MTS?

James Bedford

There seems to be considerable interest as to why there has been, within the ranks of LRTA, dissatisfaction with the political leadership of MTS. Here are three reasons that I will put forward for why we should be dissatisfied with our MTS leadership.

If you read the minutes of the Provincial Executive Meeting held on November 12-13, 2009 you'll see the following;

Wiebe – Ehinger – That the Provincial Executive be responsible to the Code of Professional Practice for Teachers. **DEFEATED**

Given that the Vice President of MTS recently spoke to new teachers in the LRTA about the importance of the Code of Professional Practice for Teachers, and how this Code binds together all public school teachers, it is surprising that the Provincial Executive, of which he is a member, rejected the idea that this same Code should apply to them. Perhaps I should qualify this statement somewhat. Using the words of the MTS President (found on the MTS website) in response to an *Ask the President* question of last year;

“...the members of the Provincial Executive are all teachers and are subject to – and protected by – the MTS Code of Professional Conduct in their teaching role.”

There is the catch. When they are teachers, Provincial Executive members are like the rest of us, bound to the Code. But when they are Provincial Executive members, they are not. This sort of double standard puts us on a very slippery slope. The argument seems to be that the Code is only written to address issues of the classroom teacher. I would argue that this view is for those unable to extend the values encompassed by the Code beyond the classroom.

The Code does extend beyond the classroom if you happen to be a parent, because we parent-teachers are constantly reminded that the Code applies when we meet with our children's teachers. As a matter of fact, the Code applies to us 24 hours a day when we are dealing with fellow public school teachers. But ask yourself, “are you in your teaching role when you are talking to your children's teachers?” Perhaps teachers who are parents should be exempted from the Code while acting “in their parent role?” The questions are entirely rhetorical. In my opinion, the Code encompasses ethics that any reasonable person would accept as perfectly fair. However, it appears as if the Provincial Executive has difficulty with the same type of acceptance.

My second argument pertains to the non-extension of previous Assistant General Secretary's contract with MTS. The previous AGS was a former President of MTS, a long time Staff Officer of MTS and served as AGS for several years before being dumped from her position. For the final year of her term, the AGS was the acting General Secretary of the MTS after the former General Secretary's rather mysterious *early retirement*. Our previous AGS was given a standing ovation at the 2009 AGM for her work as Acting GS, and was further endorsed by Association Presidents at the August 2009 →



...WHAT'S WRONG AT MTS? (continued from page 6)

meeting of Presidents' Council. However, Provincial Executive chose to ignore these endorsements and dump their successful AGS. By motion, the Association Presidents chose to ask the Provincial Executive to reconsider their decision. The Provincial Executive, it seems, chose to not even bother listening and did not even consider a Motion to Reconsider. Provincial Executive members are supposed to be our representatives, but when they do not heed the advice of our Association Presidents, you have to wonder who are they listening to? Or maybe a better question is to ask, what is their motivation for not listening?

Until recently, Provincial Executive had the authority to hire all staff of the MTS. For this, we put great trust in the Provincial Executive; trust that they would make the right decision and hire the best people to do important work for us. Obviously, whenever you entrust a group of people to hire, you entrust them not to hire their friends, not to hire people based on patronage, not to hire people as compensation for some past favour or in expectation of a future favour. When an individual who has done excellent work for an organization is let go without explanation, it makes you question the motivation. I can only imagine the uncertainty that it created in the staff of the organization. It should be little wonder to any member of MTS that the Provincial Executive has had its ability to hire staff removed by motion of Provincial Council. It was also deemed necessary by this Association to move a resolution at last year's AGM to instruct Provincial Executive to extend the contract of the current GS, a resolution that was fortunately passed, so that he would not be dumped as our previous AGS was.

My final argument is one based less on a specific incident and more on an overriding method of operation. The Provincial Executive, including of course the President and Vice President, are elected to be our representatives. In large part, they must represent us to a variety of internal and external organizations. At one time I represented one of those internal organizations, the Governance Board of the Disability Benefits Plan. Even though it was certainly my wish as Chair of the Board to regularly meet with the Provincial Executive, they did not seem the least bit interested in meeting with me and we had only one successful meeting. As some of you might know, there emerged a considerable degree of friction between the Governance Board of the DBP and the Provincial Executive. At the time this friction stemmed from a secret audit commissioned by the Provincial Executive with which they decided to launch an attack on the Governance Board rather than enter into productive dialogue. This was not an isolated case; it was in fact business as usual for the Provincial Executive. Discussions regarding pension issues, which we would naturally think would involve the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, are virtually non-existent. Again, rather than dialogue, the Provincial Executive chose simply to shut out. Professional staff of MTS, who at one time were organized into an independent union and usually enjoyed a mutually productive relationship with their employer, are now organized as a local of the Teamsters Union. This was a result of years of very messy and difficult negotiations with the Provincial Executive.

All of these issues spoke to the inability of Provincial Executive to dialogue when issues are potentially adversarial. Rather than building bridges, opening lines of communication, and solving problems, Provincial Executive and MTS Presidents in recent years have chosen to selectively cut themselves off from the membership and shut down communications, and in doing so generate a variety of problems which may no longer be solvable by future Provincial Executives and future MTS Presidents.



GS term to be extended

On August 22, 2010 at a regular meeting of the Provincial Executive of the Manitoba Teachers' Society this motion was passed:

Mckinstry – Johnson: That the President and Vice President enter negotiations with the General Secretary regarding extension of his contract per AGM Resolution B11.

Carried

Once again a motion brought forward by the LRTA to the AGM was passed to insure that the current General Secretary is offered a two year extension of his personal services contract. It was argued by our Association that this action supports the objects of the Society as stated in the Constitution "to advance and safeguard the welfare of teachers in Manitoba." This extension of his contract would provide stability and continuity to the Society. The LRTA felt it had to be directive in its dealings with the Executive. This motion insures that Resolution B11 is followed.



Congratulations are extended to Jennifer (Shamrock School) and Martin Petras on the birth of a sister for Matteo, Isabella Theresa on October 21st, born at 8:00 p.m., weighing 7 lbs. 15.5 oz. CONGRATS!

**The LRTA is
here for you**

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Please don't hesitate to contact us!