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Why Change?

The world has changed substantially over the last half of a century. Many developing countries have seen a shift from an industrial or agricultural-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. Likewise, labour market requirements have changed. To address these societal and economic shifts, education systems must change to ensure students have the competencies and skills to thrive in an ever-changing world. In the last decade, many jurisdictions have implemented renewal initiatives to ensure both students and teachers are prepared for the 21st century. Literature cited below further discusses requirements for 21st century teaching and learning, as well as debates around technology and pedagogical practices.

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What works in education? What improves student learning?

There has been an ongoing debate within the field of education regarding the importance of quality versus quantity of instruction. The results are somewhat mixed with regards to the relationship between instruction time (quantity) and student achievement. However, the most robust and comprehensive studies show a weak or no significant relationship. The research concludes that the focus should be on improving teaching quality and curriculum rather than increasing instructional time. In fact, the culmination of decades of research has concluded that the *teacher* has the greatest impact on student learning; research also suggests that the giving teachers opportunities for structured collaborative professional learning (such as Professional Learning Communities), and embedding planning and professional development within the school day are some of the most effective means to improve teaching. Many jurisdictions in OECD countries as well as other provinces in Canada have implemented or are working towards making these opportunities available in schools. The literature below discusses these topics.

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Teacher workload and wellness

Over the last decade or so almost all jurisdictions in Canada have conducted teacher workload studies. Recently the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, as well as the Department of Education, Culture and Employment conducted teacher workload studies. The findings from the NWT studies were similar to those found across Canada. Teachers are generally working between 50-55 hours per week, much higher than other public sector workers. Teachers in the NWT noted that there was a lack of planning time during the instructional day, and highlighted the importance of peer relationships and collaboration. A shift to 21st century learning and teaching requires more time for planning (e.g. for project or inquiry-based learning), as well as time and support for teachers to work collaboratively within the school day. Evidence from studies in Alberta noted that these shifts resulted in increased workload for teachers. Hence, without system level changes, there would be great challenge in bringing forth the much needed changes in education without jeopardizing teacher wellness. The literature below references numerous workload studies that have been conducted across Canada, as well as literature on work intensification, teacher retention issues, the impact of implementing inquiry-based learning, etc.



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Moving forward with Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practice

The NWT has the highest instructional hours in Canada, along with Nunavut. Yet, the NWT and Nunavut have the poorest educational outcomes (e.g. graduation rates). A pan-Canadian jurisdictional scan conducted by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment revealed that most jurisdictions in Canada have made adjustments to their instructional time over the last two decades. In most of these cases, jurisdictions have reduced their instructional time, in some instances to build in more time for teacher professional learning. There is growing recognition of the need for jurisdictions to implement changes to allow for more job-embedded, collaborative professional learning. Given that the research suggests that changes to instructional time, while staying within the realm of world norms, has no significant impact on student learning, and given that the NWT has the highest instructional time in Canada, an opportunity was found to make changes to improve teaching practice, which research shows has a positive impact on student learning, teacher efficacy, and teacher job satisfaction. The citations below reference a jurisdictional comparison of instructional time, as well as some reports and resources related to collaborative professional learning.

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