
Understanding Professional Judgement

Teachers’ professional judgements are at the heart of effective assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement.

(Growing Success, page 8)

Professional Judgement is defined within this document as:

Judgement that is informed by professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, context, evidence of learning, methods of instruction and assessment, and the criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning. In professional practice, judgement involves a purposeful and systematic thinking process that evolves in terms of accuracy and insight with ongoing reflection and self-correction.

(Growing Success, page 152)

This resource has been developed to clarify teachers’ understanding about what is and is not “Professional Judgement.”

If you are questioned regarding your ability to exercise your Professional Judgement as a classroom teacher, you are advised to consult your Union representative.

The following ARE NOT a matter of Professional Judgement but ARE examples of Professional Duty and/or Responsibility (this is not an exhaustive list):

- abiding by legislation (Health & Safety, *Education Act*, Copyright, Human Rights, etc.) and regulations
- completing duties assigned (if permitted under the Collective Agreement)
- covering the curriculum expectations
- following the assessment/evaluation guidelines and *Growing Success* policy
- following board policies and procedures
- following school/department budgets and board spending policies/guidelines
- following the Standards of Practice as identified by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)
- following IEPs and safety plans
- teaching the courses assigned (if qualifications are listed on your Ontario Teaching Certificate)
- completing lesson plans, long-range course planning
- reporting student attendance
- completing report cards (this does not preclude an administrator's decision to change a mark or grant a credit; however, administrators cannot mandate that you change a mark but teachers will be consulted, where possible, if a student's grade/mark/comment is changed)
- participating in parent/teacher interviews
- communicating with students and parents/guardians
- proctoring OSSLT or other EQAO tests
- allowing administrators to visit your classroom, announced or unannounced for purposes other than Teacher Performance Appraisal
- attending meetings with administration when requested
- attending staff meetings
- participating in IPRCs when requested
- attending meetings for the creation of IEPs and/or safety plans when requested*
- attending/supervising assemblies mandated during the school day
- completing your Annual Learning Plan
- participating in employer directed PD.

The following examples ARE matters of Professional Judgement (this is not an exhaustive list):

- choosing the order and emphasis of specific expectations when delivering the curriculum
- identifying the instructional strategies to deliver the curriculum
- determining the format and content of your lesson plans
- selecting methods for differentiating instruction and assessments for students
- deciding what resources are used to support the curriculum and outcomes and whether or not to use ministry approved textbooks
- choosing the frequency, timing, methods and types of assessment and evaluation used to measure student learning
- determining the method and frequency for providing feedback to students
- determining the method and frequency of communication with parents and students beyond the requirements under the *Education Act* and its regulations
- determining the format and content of lesson plans/information for occasional teachers
- deciding what format to use and the content of lessons for absent/suspended students
- choosing what input you provide into the development of IEPs and safety plans*
- determining the information included in a teacher's Annual Learning Plan
- choosing to participate in PD outside of the school day/year.

*Under the *Education Act* (specifically, the Regulations and Ministry of Education Policies and Program Memoranda) teachers have the right to be included in the development of IEPs and safety plans for students that they work with on an on-going and daily basis.

Being told how to fulfill your duties and responsibilities might be a challenge of your Professional Judgement; requiring you to fulfill those duties and responsibilities is not.

Compliance with or violations of the Collective Agreement might not be a challenge of your Professional Judgement.

General tips:

- To avoid charges of insubordination, you must follow the instructions/ directions of your administrator.
- If you believe that your Professional Judgement is being questioned by the employer or you are unsure of whether or not a situation falls under the purview of Professional Judgement, please contact your branch representative and/or local Bargaining Unit leader.
- Early and on-going communication with parents and students is necessary to avoid challenges to your Professional Judgement. Teachers should keep a comprehensive log of all communications—including dates, times, person contacted and a synopsis of the conversation/ information shared.
- The member's professional conduct should be characterized by courtesy and good faith, and should imply the obligation to refrain from public criticism of the member's colleagues (OSSTF/FEESO Policy 1.3.3 Ethics).
- A member of OSSTF/FEESO shall exert every effort to raise professional standards, to promote a climate that encourages the free exercise of professional judgment, to foster co-operative relationships among colleagues, and to assist in preventing the practice of a profession by unqualified persons (OSSTF/FEESO Policy 1.4.4 Professional Conduct).
- When responding to colleagues, including those in positions of added responsibility, try the following: "Thanks for the feedback; I will consider your input."
- When dealing with the public, try the following: "I am fulfilling my responsibilities and duties as outlined by the Ontario College of Teachers, the *Education Act* and the board policies and procedures."
- Approach these interactions with colleagues and the public **as conversations** not **confrontations**.