



**Pre-Budget
Public Consultations**

**Brief Presented to
Honourable Jerome Kennedy
Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board
February 2013**



Introduction

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association appreciates the opportunity to present a submission to Government as part of the pre-budget consultation process for the 2013 Provincial Budget. The NLTA speaks for approximately 6,000 teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and has a long standing interest in education and the students of this province. We have been providing input to government through this venue for nearly two decades, attempting to bring a focus to critical areas in K-12 education which requires greater attention and additional resources. In our more recent pre-budget submissions, we have identified and targeted specific priority areas. In reviewing these pre-budget submissions for the past several years, we note that the same key issues have been raised. However, provincial budgets over that time have not provided the resources necessary to adequately address these important areas.

In the introduction to our 2012 pre-budget submission, we noted that the 2011 provincial budget, "was very much status quo for primary, elementary and secondary education in this province" and that "none of the priorities which were identified by the NLTA in our pre-budget brief were addressed in any meaningful way". In our news release following the release of the 2012 provincial budget, we noted that it contained "no improvements for education and is a budget of reductions in several important areas".

So, for the past number of years, the NLTA has been requesting additional funding in our submissions to the pre-budget consultations to address critical areas for education, for students and for teachers. We find ourselves in the unenviable position of having to repeat that same message and to draw attention to those priority areas again this year. However, this year the task is made much more difficult as, for the past number of months, the consistent message from government is one of projected deficits, belt tightening and anticipated cuts in areas of government spending such as education and health.

Now is Not the Time

Our message to government at this time is that now is not the time to reduce spending in education. Ironically, while the Premier and Finance Minister have been emphasizing the likelihood of significant deficits for the next two fiscal years, we are also receiving news from all quarters about the prosperous state of the Newfoundland and Labrador economy. The growth in GDP for 2013 is projected to be the highest of any province in Canada and the province's unemployment rate is at the lowest it has ever been. Unfortunately, due to a temporary shortfall in oil production this past year and oil prices being at less than projected levels, government revenues have dipped. However, we would caution most strongly against spending cuts in education that would negatively affect the system over the long term, based on what is projected to be a temporary deficit situation.

If students from Newfoundland and Labrador are to participate in the economic revival of this province, education is critical. The students who are now in our K-12 school system must be adequately prepared, via a well-resourced education system, to participate meaningfully in this province's economic growth.

By its very nature, the provision of education to our young people is an enterprise that is heavily dependent on human resources; the teachers, administrators and support staff who are providing services directly to children and young people. Consequently, any significant reduction in government spending in education will impact the provision of these human resources and thus will impact students directly. Since 2008, with government's response to the Report of the Teacher Allocation Commission, much progress has been made in limiting class sizes and providing additional teaching resources to the province's schools. Now is not the time to fall back on these gains. Now is not the time for cuts in teaching resources that would result in class size increases and loss of supports for inclusive education. Parents and teachers cannot accept a return to larger class sizes which will lessen teachers' ability to meet the diverse needs of students in today's inclusive

classrooms. We urge government to do all in its power to ensure that anticipated deficits in the short term are not permitted to negatively impact our classrooms and reduce much needed opportunities for our children.

In our 2012 pre-budget brief, we again identified five areas which we felt were critical areas for education in this province. These were:

- Student Support Services/Inclusion
- Teacher Allocations
- Teacher Leaves and the Provision of Substitute Days
- Student Supervision, and
- Human Resources Support for Technology.

We reiterate our message from last year's submission, that improvements are needed in all of these areas and that now is not the time for reducing the province's investment in education.

In the remainder of this pre-budget submission, we have included brief notes on the five key areas identified above. Greater detail on all of these areas can be found in our 2012 pre-budget submission and can also be provided upon request.

Student Support Services/Inclusion

The implementation of the inclusion philosophy and the provision of necessary services to special needs students are, without exception, the areas in which we receive the greatest number of expressions of concern from teachers.

Concerns continue to be expressed that the implementation of the inclusion philosophy might result in cuts to teacher allocations and there is a strong message from teachers that the NLTA should continue to represent these concerns to Government and advocate for the necessary resources and professional development to make the model work.

Readiness to deal with the issues surrounding inclusion requires training and professional development.

The NLTA appreciates the Department of Education's work to date in developing and communicating its ongoing plan to provide in-service/professional development to educators related to all issues pertinent to inclusion. However, the NLTA feels strongly that it is essential that educators receive this training before they are required to implement the inclusion philosophy.

Teacher Allocations

It is widely known that allocating sufficient numbers of teachers is critical to ensuring student success and that smaller class sizes allow teachers to give necessary attention to the needs of those students who are most in need of additional support. In our view the following are critical areas of the Teacher Allocation Model that need further attention in order to be adequately addressed.

- **Allocations for Special Needs/Inclusion**

As stated in the previous section, the area of special needs and inclusion continues to be the most critical area of concern expressed by teachers who question their ability to provide the necessary services with the current level of resources and supports.

- **Very small rural schools**

Many of our very small rural schools are still struggling to provide a full educational program necessary for equitable educational opportunities for students. Government needs to provide additional funding for improved allocations of teachers to small rural schools.

- **Application of the “needs based” portion of the model**

The “needs based” portion of the Teacher Allocation Model has not been fully implemented. While it is being used to provide some additional teaching units to address particular needs, more teaching units are needed to better address such needs. Such units are necessary as needs for additional teaching units in schools are frequently identified outside of the “numbers driven” or “formula driven” parts of the model.

- **Improved class size maximums for Kindergarten**

The current class size maximums for Kindergarten is 20 per session or 40 students per teacher. Considering the unique needs of Kindergarten students, the detailed student assessment and reporting required, parent teacher interviews and such initiatives as the KinderStart program, these numbers create an unreasonably high workload for Kindergarten teachers and compromise the education of students at this critical entry to formal education.

- **Improved specialist allocations**

The NLTA recognizes that the inclusion of primary and elementary students in the allocation of specialist teachers to districts has been beneficial. However, the new allocations, while a major improvement, are still insufficient to meet the needs, especially in the primary and elementary grades.

- **Allocation model for high school grades**

No class size maximums have yet been applied to grades 10-12. Teachers are allocated on the basis of the total number of students in the school. The nature of course selection by high school students and the necessity to offer a broad curriculum results in an inequity in class size between large mainstream classes such as English, Social Studies and Academic Mathematics and more specialized courses such as Physics, Chemistry and Advanced Mathematics.

- **French Immersion**

The Teacher Allocation Model makes no separate provision for schools that offer a French Immersion stream. This means that the total number of students at a grade level in a school is considered when the maximum class sizes are applied to determine the number of teaching units to be allocated for the grade. That is, the French Immersion and English streams are not considered separately. This can create inequities in class sizes in those schools.

Teacher Leaves and Provision of Substitute Teacher Days

In order to replace teachers who are granted leaves to attend to necessary professional development and family leave, substitute teachers are required. These leaves are granted at the discretion of the school board and are severely limited by the number of substitute teacher days allocated to the school boards in the Provincial Budget. The substitute teacher budget for these two types of leave (family leaves and professional development) is, and has been, inadequate to address the needs of the districts and teachers, and should be significantly increased.

The Provincial Budget has not distinguished between the various types of discretionary leaves which are being allocated under the substitute teacher budget. The lumping of funding for all such teacher leaves in this manner is problematic for teachers, the districts, and the Department of Education. Substitute days should be allocated and identified in the Provincial Budget in separate categories for: family leave; professional development; and other leaves.

Student Supervision

Lunchtime student supervision by teachers is a poor use of professional time and a wasteful use of a relatively expensive resource. Providing teachers with adequate time free from supervision duty during lunch is in the best interest of students. When added to the daily preparation, teaching, assessment and reporting responsibilities of teachers, lunchtime supervision of students is an unnecessary demand on teachers' time and a drain of energy for teachers and ultimately has a negative impact on teaching and students. For these reasons, the NLTA has been advocating for the use of external paid supervision during lunch time.

Human Resources Support for Technology

While additional supports and personnel have been deployed to deal with many of these technological issues, teachers continue to need professional learning in the integration of technology into the classroom. There is an increased expectation that teachers will integrate technology into teaching and learning, and that on-site support and training be available. It is important to move to a model of professional learning that better prepares teachers for the integration of technologies into teaching and learning and encourages continued exploration and lifelong learning in preparation for new shifts in technology.

Conclusion

Addressing the issues outlined in this brief will mean a greater commitment by Government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2013 Budget. As already stated, now is not the time for cuts in teaching resources that would result in class size increases and loss of supports for inclusive education. We feel that these are very critical areas that need attention if we are to continue making progress in our education system. The NLTA urges Government to make this further commitment to education and to demonstrate it in real terms when the budget is presented to the people of the province.



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