



**Pre-Budget
Public Consultations**

**Brief Presented to
Honourable Charlene Johnson
Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board
February 2014**



Introduction

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to government as part of the pre-budget consultation process for the 2014 Provincial Budget. The NLTA represents approximately 6,000 teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and is dedicated to educational leadership and service for the betterment of the education system and the students of the 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 and we will continue to do so in this submission. However, we must first comment on the tenor and impact of the most recent Budget 2013. The government focus in Budget 2013 was on reducing deficits and making cuts, including cuts to education services. We were discouraged that government treated education as an expense to be controlled rather than as an investment to provide growth and to ensure future prosperity. We find it necessary to address this issue prior to discussing our suggested priorities for Budget 2014.

Education is an investment, not an expense.

It is our understanding that government agrees that education is a priority and that the province must provide the best education possible for our children. The question though is – are we? If education is as important as government says it is, why then, year after year after year does the NLTA have to fight against cuts – teacher cuts, resource cuts, K-12 system cuts? Every one of those cuts diminishes our ability to deliver the quality of education that teachers want to deliver.

The problem is this: Despite government's use of the word "investment" to describe education spending in the Throne speech, in reality government treats the cost of education as an expense, as a cost to be controlled, not as an investment. So every year as budget time rolls around, education is reduced to a line item, an overhead, a cost. The objective then becomes – get that cost down – no matter what. Decisions are then made under the assumption that we can maintain the status quo with less money and our children are suffering the consequences of that failed assumption.

Teachers have asked repeatedly for greater investment and more support for children with special needs in keeping with the provincial government's stated commitment to inclusion – that is, allowing students with special needs to receive instruction within the regular classroom setting with their peers. Inclusion obviously requires teachers to deliver differentiated learning to accommodate the children in their classrooms who have special needs. Not only did Budget 2013 not provide the required and requested human resources and other supports, it cut some of the learning resource teachers who are charged with the responsibility of supporting the delivery of differentiated learning. Neither the needs of special needs students nor their classroom peers are now being met as envisioned by the model of inclusion. That's what happens when government treats education as an expense and not an investment.

Budget 2013 consolidated four English-language school boards into one, thereby increasing the administrative burden on schools. Simultaneously, government cut administrative time to schools, pushing more administrative responsibilities on classroom teachers. This has meant less time for classroom teachers to teach and address the needs of students.

For many years, the number of teachers assigned to each school in this province was based solely on a numeric formula. As the number of children enrolled in the K-12 school system dropped, the number of teachers was cut correspondingly. In 2008, government announced a new method for allocating teaching resources, finally recognizing that cuts based on the numeric formula were "unworkable." In a news release, government indicated the new method was "based on the premise that regardless of where a student lives or how many students attend a particular school, all are entitled to equal access, and to a quality education and opportunities." The then Minister of Education had this to say: "... the focus now is on need, not numbers

and I am confident the new model will serve our students and teachers extremely well for many years.” Just five years later in Budget 2013, government cut 66 of the 129 positions that should have been retained according to this new formula. Budget 2013 also included cuts to the number of Skilled Trades & Technology teachers, to the number of Art and Music teachers, and to the number of Physical Education teachers.

We recognize that in the K-12 education system a significant amount of the education budget is being spent on infrastructure. The last five provincial budgets have included close to half a billion dollars in spending on new school buildings, and this infrastructure spending has been necessary. But infrastructure spending should not come at the expense of what is supposed to go on in the classrooms of these buildings – teachers providing our children with the quality education they deserve.

What does the research say about education as an investment?

Research is clear. Education is key to combatting increases in the cost of health care, social services, crime, and in ensuring economic prosperity of society.

There is a direct correlation between quality education and health. The better educated the parents, the healthier the child. Better educated people lose fewer days at work due to ill health. Each additional year of K-12 education better equips individuals to make good choices with respect to their health and other important life decisions.

The less education parents have, the more likely their children are to become teen parents. Teenage parents are more likely to drop out of high school, have poorer parenting skills, and experience higher rates of poverty. And so the cycle continues into the next generation. In 2001, NL had 26.4 pregnancies per 1000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19. In 2010, it had climbed all the way to 32.7. Our teenage pregnancy rate rose by 23.9 per cent between 2001 and 2010, while the Canadian average dropped by 20.3 per cent.

The more educated a parent, the less likely that parent is to abuse or neglect their child. Children of more educated parents generally perform better in school. On the other hand, children of less-educated parents often cost more to educate as they are more likely to need special interventions.

Higher education levels, particularly graduating from high school, consistently lower the probability of incarceration, of criminal arrests, and of individuals admitting to having committed crimes. Children’s likelihood of committing crime decreases as their parents’ education increases.

Students in small classes are not only more likely to finish high school on time, but are more likely to graduate in the top 25 per cent. But reducing the student-teacher ratio is just one area. Research has consistently shown that student achievement benefits not only from small class sizes, but from qualified teachers, safe school environments, and up-to-date instructional materials and technology.

Education as an investment will see over time a reduction in unemployment, reduced dependence on public assistance programs, and an increased tax base. Education as an investment requires government to take a long-term view with a long-term plan. While that’s not how government typically seems to operate, the long-term benefits of education as an investment are so profoundly beneficial to our society as a whole, a long-term view must be taken.

Treating education as an investment is critical to the future of our children, and in turn, our province. The decision – expense or investment – will carve out two very different futures for our entire society.

In 1995 the provincial government allocated 21 per cent of its budgetary spending to education (Kindergarten through post-secondary), and just over 23 per cent of its total budget to health care. In 2005, spending on education remained at 20 per cent, while health care had risen to 39 per cent. By 2012, spending on education had plummeted to 10 per cent, while health care spending remained at 39 per cent. Education must be prioritized with a renewed level of investment.

So where should government be investing in education?

Education as investment would compel us to reduce the class size to the level that would maximize our return on investment. Teacher allocation should be based on need – not a formula.

Inclusion of children with special needs into regular classrooms should get more than lip service. That means providing additional special needs teachers, student assistant hours and other resources.

Schools should have an adequate number of support staff so that administrative and clerical tasks do not fall to teachers.

Students should have the best educational technology available, coupled with professional development for teachers so they know how to maximize the return on that investment.

Every child in this province should have frequent physical education and regular exposure to the Arts.

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.

NLTA Priorities for Budget 2014

In our 2014 pre-budget brief, we identify five areas which we feel are critical areas for education in this province. These are:

- Teacher Allocation Cuts Made in 2013
- Support for the Implementation of Inclusion
- Teacher Allocations
- Teacher Leaves and the Provision of Substitute Teacher Days, and
- Human Resources Support for Technology.

Teacher Allocation Cuts Made In 2013

The reduction in the allocation for **school administrative time** means less time that school administrators have to perform the required administrative responsibilities. This reduction has occurred simultaneously with the amalgamation of school districts and corresponding decreases in administrative support for schools. As well, anti-bullying initiatives which require extensive administrative intervention and documentation are being proposed as part of the provincial Safe and Caring Schools initiative. So, greater expectations and responsibilities have been placed on school principals and assistant principals at the same time as their allocated time to complete these responsibilities have been cut. The result being reported to the NLTA is both an unreasonable workload creating fatigue/burnout of administrators and a downloading of administrative responsibilities onto classroom teachers resulting in less time to teach and to meet the needs of students in the classroom.

The reduction in the allocation of **specialist teachers in intermediate schools** is a straightforward reduction in government's commitment to the Arts and music and physical education which flies in the face of educational research regarding developing well rounded and healthy citizens.

Learning resource teachers (teacher librarians) and **numeracy/literacy support teachers** provide valuable support to students and teachers necessary to support differentiated instruction and inclusion. The negative impact on schools of the reduction in allocation in these areas is regularly being reported to the NLTA.

The NLTA recommends the reversal of teacher allocation cuts made in 2013.

Support for the Implementation of Inclusion

The support for implementation of the inclusion model is the area in which we receive the greatest number of expressions of concern and frustration from teachers. Special needs students who had often been excluded from the regular classroom or regularly pulled out in small groups, with a special needs teacher and perhaps a student assistant, are now being included in the regular classroom with their peers. However, the individual students are not always being accompanied by their special needs teachers and/or student assistants. The result is an increased demand on the classroom teacher, already challenged to meet the needs of a differentiated classroom. In the absence of sufficient support, the classroom teacher must prioritize to meet the greatest need, perhaps the autistic child exhibiting a disruptive behaviour, or the child with a medical concern, or the attention required by a learning disabled child to meet the child's learning needs. The consequence is that neither the needs of the special services student, or the needs of their non-special needs peers in the classroom are adequately met, leading to frustration on the part of the students and to frustration and a feeling of inadequacy on the part of the teacher.

The needs-based model of teacher allocation adopted in 2008 anticipated that additional teachers would be available in September if a school(s) identified a need which emerged since the original allocations were determined the previous spring. Implementation of the inclusion model routinely causes unexpected demands each September for additional human resources to meet the needs of special needs students now included in the classroom. Unfortunately, requests for resources to address the classrooms' needs are being denied because the teachers or student assistants have not been budgeted. Schools who have requested additional human resources are often being asked to redeploy existing special services so that the priority needs are addressed. The consequence is neither the requirements of the special needs students nor the non-special needs students in the classroom are adequately met and teachers become concerned and frustrated with the inability to meet expectations.

The NLTA recommends government budget 150 teaching units to be available to be deployed by the Department of Education if required to address needs identified and associated with the implementation of the inclusion model during the school year.

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. **Class size maximums must be maintained.**

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**
(Addressed above)

- **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 approach is totally impractical and creates immediate problems. A simple example illustrates the problem. A school with 100 Grade 5s – 35 French Immersion and 65 English stream students – is currently allocated four teachers based in a ratio of 1:25. This means either two classes of 17 and 18 for French Immersion and two classes of 32 and 33 for English stream classes *or* one class of 35 for

French Immersion and three classes of 22, 22 and 21 for English stream classes – neither scenario being acceptable. **French Immersion and English streams should receive separate allocation.** Based on our simple example, five teachers would be allocated to this school instead of four.

- **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.

- **Allocation model for high school classes**

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. Class size maximums should be established for high school classes.

The NLTA recommends French Immersion and English streams receive separate allocation.

The NLTA recommends that small rural schools receive additional allocations as identified by need of the school to meet the program requirements.

The NLTA recommends that a class size maximum be established for high school classes.

Teacher Leaves and the 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 NLTA is committed to obtaining non-discretionary leave for family days through the collective bargaining process. Notwithstanding, the budget for professional development and other leaves 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: professional development; and other leaves.

The NLTA recommends that additional funds be allocated for the substitute teacher budget specifically for the purpose of professional development.

Human Resources Support for Technology

Funds have been and continue to be directed towards improving technology available to students. Successful integration of technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum requires a teacher who is motivated and engaged in making that transformation. Teachers need to be supported with adequate resources, time, professional development, and technical support.

The NLTA recommends that funds be allocated to support resources and professional development of teachers for the purpose of technology integration in the curriculum.

Conclusion

Addressing the issues outlined in this brief require government in Budget 2014 to commit to treating education as an investment, not an expense. Taking this long-term approach will address many of our concerns. We have identified areas that require immediate attention if we are to continue making progress in our education system. The NLTA urges government to make the investment and implement the following recommendations to demonstrate the commitment to education to the people of the province in Budget 2014.

Recommendations:

1. The NLTA recommends the reversal of teacher allocation cuts made in 2013.
2. The NLTA recommends government budget 150 teaching units to be available to be deployed by the Department of Education if required to address needs identified and associated with the implementation of the inclusion model during the school year.
3. The NLTA recommends French Immersion and English streams receive separate allocation.
4. The NLTA recommends that small rural schools receive additional allocations as identified by need of the school to meet the program requirements.
5. The NLTA recommends that a class size maximum be established for high school classes.
6. The NLTA recommends that additional funds be allocated for the substitute teacher budget specifically for the purpose of professional development.
7. The NLTA recommends that funds be allocated to support resources and professional development of teachers for the purpose of technology integration in the curriculum.



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